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WEST AFRICAN PSYCHOLOGY

A Comparative Study of Psychological
and Religious Thought

By

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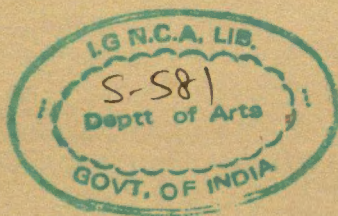


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TO
MY WIFE
Who has shared the life
and the separations of Africa

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:
The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting,
And cometh from afar:
Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, who is our home.

Wordsworth

Phonetic letters used:

ɛ as in *let*

ɔ as in *ought*

ŋ as in *sing*

~ over nasalized vowel.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

It would be presumptuous for any European to imagine that he could fully penetrate the depths either of the actual psychology of the African, or of the African's thought about his own soul and being. The subject is so intricate, and largely uncharted, that it is no wonder that many writers have given it but scanty attention.

In the last thirty years the beliefs of many African tribes, in gods and ancestors, have been investigated by trained field workers. The comparative study of African religion has begun. But the idea of the soul is less prominent, and there is no comparative account of West African psychological beliefs, such as will help the student of comparative religion and psychology at home, and the colonial worker abroad. This present study essays to present such a comparative account, not completely but as accurately as possible, from the facts as given by African and European observers.

The first danger which confronts the student is that of translating African ideas into European categories. The best authorities have noted this. Thus Dr. M. J. Herskovits, in his great work upon Dahomey, writes: "Few aspects of West African religion have produced such contradictory reports as those dealing with indigenous concepts of the soul. This is in part due to the fact that field investigation has been carried on by many who were under the influence of the animistic preconceptions held by the early workers in the field of theoretical anthropology—a preconception treated by these field-workers as a position to be validated rather than as an hypothesis to be tested."¹

French scholarship has recently produced one of its finest pieces of African research in the posthumous publication of Dr. Maupoil's study of the Ifa divining system. Maupoil also declares that "the problem of the soul deserves a special study", but rather pointedly adds that "we admire those authors who succeed in making the 'soul' of others the object of recapitulatory tables, complete with decorations".² This is a sly dig

¹ *Dahomey, An Ancient West African Kingdom*, New York, 1938, p. 231.

² *La Géomancie à l'Ancienne Côte des Esclaves*, Paris, 1943, pp. 378 and 405.

at the four pages of classified "Names for the Soul", given by P. Amaury Talbot for the southern Nigerian tribes.¹

Even more stringent warnings are uttered by the Dutch father, Placide Tempels, in a very important little book, whose value is out of all proportion to its size. It is on the philosophy of the Bantu of the Congo, but its thought may be applied also to much in western Africa. Father Tempels says that, "He who would enter, for example, upon the path of research into what words correspond, in Bantu dialects, to our notions of soul, spirit, will, feeling, etc., would postulate already that the Bantu divide a man as we do into soul and body, and that in the soul they distinguish the various faculties just as we do. This would not be a study of Bantu psychology, it would be, on the contrary, denying the existence of their own psychology, in supposing that it suffices to translate our terminology. To prevent this false start, it is necessary on the contrary to make a *tabula rasa* of our own conceptions in psychological matters, and prepare ourselves for the eventuality of ending with a very different conception of man from that which we hold in honour. We have nothing better to do than to listen to and analyse what the black people themselves say about this being that we are accustomed to call a 'reasonable animal'. . . . We do not pretend that the Bantu are capable of presenting us with a treatise of philosophy, explained with an adequate vocabulary. It is for us to make a systematic development of it. It is we ourselves who can tell them, in a precise way, what is their intimate conception of beings, and they, recognizing themselves in our words, will then acquiesce by saying: 'You have understood us, now you know us completely, you "know" in the way in which we "know" . . . you speak like our fathers; it seemed indeed that we must be right.'"²

In face of these solemn admonishments, one must indeed proceed warily. But it is evident that a study of the ideas about the nature and soul of man, such as one can discover, is necessary not only because of the general ignorance of the ideas of the soul which West Africans hold, but also in view of certain terms used by older writers and travellers, which have come to be used somewhat indiscriminately as sufficient representations of mysterious African notions. Terms such as "external

¹ *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria*, 1926, vol. ii, pp. 275-278.

² *La Philosophie Bantoue*, traduit du néerlandais, Elisabethville, 1945, pp. 20, 74-76. I am indebted to the kindness of the Belgian Colonial Secretary in London, in presenting me with a copy of this book at a time when it was very difficult to obtain it through the normal channels.

soul", "bush soul," "dream soul", "volatile soul", "over-soul". On the other hand, Father Tempels castigates the efforts of more modern anthropologists to avoid committing themselves, by using circumlocutions: "It is no longer possible to be content with vague locutions as: 'mysterious forces of 'being', 'certain beliefs', 'indefinable influences', or 'a certain conception of man and nature'. Similar definitions, empty of all content, have exactly no scientific bearing."¹

Readers will be familiar with Sir James Frazer's chapters on "The Doctrine of the External Soul".² Frazer has done monumental work, collecting and comparing masses of material from primitive and from more developed religions. One disadvantage of his method, however, is that it often appears, at least, to suggest that similar ideas are current everywhere among primitive peoples, unless the contrary is definitely stated. Thus we are told that "the savage thinks of it [the soul] as a concrete material thing of a definite bulk, capable of being seen and handled, kept in a box or jar, and liable to be bruised, fractured or smashed to pieces".³ Fortunately the word "savage" is undefined here, and we are happy to claim exemption for most West Africans from this category, on the grounds, amongst others, that the majority of them appear to have no ideas concerning the soul which might justify such a description as that of Frazer's. We cannot but recall some of the amusing words of Mary Kingsley: "I would break a lance with Noah's Ark. I mean the 'Homogeneity of the Human Race'. . . . Jevons and Co. are caulking and breaming it with the assistance of Frazer, and the whole affair is highly irritating to a high and dry Darwinist like me."⁴

We do not forget that Mary Kingsley herself spoke of a "bush soul". But that was among the peoples of the Congo. I cannot say whether that expression was accurate, or now capable of definition in more precise terms, for the Congo peoples, having myself no experience of them. But, as far as my research and reading go for West Africa, I may affirm that this is a notion foreign to the tribes in this area, with the possible exception of some of the eastern Nigerians, whose beliefs may approximate to those of the Congolese.

The value of the comparative method, nevertheless, is undoubted, provided that its limitations are clearly realized

¹ *La Philosophie Bantoue*, p. 20.

² In *Balder the Beautiful*, 1913, vol. ii; also *The Golden Bough*, vol. iii.

³ *Balder the Beautiful*, vol. ii, p. 95.

⁴ *The Life of Mary Kingsley*, by Stephen Gwynn, Penguin edition, p. 104.

and indicated. It is because I believe this, that I have myself embarked upon studies in comparative religion and psychology, while endeavouring not to gloss over distinctive ideas held by different tribes.

In the following chapters, it will be seen that while, for the sake of convenience and order, there has to be some grouping and systematization, yet an effort has been made not to make general statements about any tribe that have not the support of positive research. In the present state of our knowledge, it is not always possible to present as complete a description as one would wish, nor to answer all the questions that might occur in the mind of the reader. But all that is stated has been checked from serious research.

One may enter here a claim for the rights of the comparative study of religion. Many of the religious and psychological beliefs of Africans have been reported under the heading of anthropology or ethnology, together with masses of more truly sociological and anthropological detail. It is, indeed, an interesting sidelight upon the psychology of anthropologists themselves that, while some are apparently agnostic in regard to Christian faith, they have become fascinated by African religion. Unhappily some missionaries, who have a theological training, have been either fanatically opposed to or totally uninterested in African beliefs. There are, happily, great exceptions. But the study of African religion and psychology is surely within the province of theology and philosophy. At least, Africa presents much matter for comparative religious study, beyond the most primitive.

There are those who deny almost entirely the validity of the comparative method, who consider each tribe to have its own special form of religion, playing its unique role in that particular society, and incomparable with any other religion. This is an exaggeration. A great authority on African religion has said recently: "In spite of these cultural diversities there is, I believe, an underlying identity in religion. I do not deny or minimize the differences you may find between the highly organized Yoruba or Baganda, with their hierarchy of gods, on the one hand; and the more simple peoples, on the other hand. But the difference is one of emphasis and development, not of essence. There is sufficient identity to warrant our speaking of African religion. . . . But there are inquiring minds in Africa which do not accept the generally prevalent notions. There are sceptics and agnostics in Africa. There are idealists

INTRODUCTORY

and materialists; the introspective and non-introspective; the devoutly religious, the intermittently religious, the indifferently religious."¹

The practical importance of the comparative study of African religion and psychology should become evident to all who are interested, either personally or professionally, in religion; and not remain only the concern of those who care for the curious and the unusual.

Even the most "fundamentalist" missionary, who goes to Africa to "save souls", should realize the importance of discovering whether the African thinks he has a soul that can possibly be saved. What would his reaction be to such a revelation as that given by Dr. Smith regarding the Ba-ila of Rhodesia? "The soul as we speak of the soul, it is doubtful whether the Ba-ila believe in it. Certainly we have never found a word that would be a satisfactory translation."²

It would be beyond our scope here to examine European ideas concerning the soul, either the classical notions or the conceptions of modern psychologists. Brief reference to the current denotation of the terms used will be made, however, in the appropriate chapters, to clarify our use of such terms.

The scope of this book is extensive with the Guinea Coast and hinterland. West African tribes are considered, from the Ivory Coast in the west to eastern Nigeria, but many of the northern tribes are included. The three large families of Akan, Ewe and Yoruba, are those with which I have the best personal acquaintance. But I have thought it useful, for the purposes of comparative study, to widen the scope of references by utilizing the findings of the best modern investigators. Therefore, in addition to Akan, Ewe and Yoruba, on most points I have referred to some tribes of the upper Ivory Coast and western Sudan; to tribes of the northern territories of the Gold Coast; to the Ibo and southern Nigerian peoples; to Jukun and northern Nigerians. In this way a more complete picture may be obtained of West African psychological and religious beliefs.

The order of study followed will be from west to east, starting with the lower Gold Coast, about which we have most information, and the lower Ivory Coast where there are tribes of Akan stock and others that are akin in belief. The most natural division of tribe is horizontal, speaking roughly, but European

¹ E. W. Smith, *Knowing the African*, 1946, p. 99.

² *The Ila-speaking Peoples of Northern Rhodesia*, 1920, vol. ii, p. 162.

powers have carved out their slices of territory vertically, thus complicating racial and ideological studies.

Hence we proceed next to the upper Gold Coast, the upper Ivory Coast and Sudan; these again have kinship of tribe and belief, for political frontiers cut across tribes, e.g. Mossi and Lobi. We continue thence to Togo and Dahomey, which are inter-related, containing most of the Ewe and not a few Yoruba.¹ The northern tribes of Togo and Dahomey are practically unknown to anthropological study, and though I have travelled through part of this country I have had little opportunity of making a serious study of such interesting tribes as the Bariba, Pila, Somba, Kabre or Gur. Thence we proceed to lower Nigeria, from Yoruba in the west to semi-Bantu tribes in the extreme east and Cameroons frontier. Finally, upper Nigeria, with such knowledge as is available of its kingdoms and tribes.

Occasional reference is also made to beliefs held in East or North Africa, but only to draw a comparison or point a contrast, without any suggestion of including all African peoples in one group. Even in West Africa there is not homogeneity, and one often has to be content with indicating similarity or difference.

Finally a chapter treats briefly of the much-debated questions of Egyptian and Islamic influence on West African indigenous belief. And a concluding chapter endeavours to sketch lines of development for the beliefs, and the attitude that Europeans might adopt towards them. No African belief can be considered as static today, and while one tries to group together the pagan and the indigenous, there is a growing syncretism and absorption of foreign ideas. In this state of transition it is important to guide development, and to have some goal at which to aim.²

The method employed in preparation of this comparative investigation is a combination of personal enquiry, together with an extensive utilization of the works of the most modern and best-qualified field workers. One student alone, and only a part-time one at that, could not hope to acquire in many years a profound knowledge of so many tribes with their babel of languages.

All the best modern writings on West Africa have been consulted, in addition to personal enquiries in different areas. Naturally there is some unevenness in the methods employed

¹ See my article in *Africa*, vol. xvii, No. 2: "Yoruba-speaking Peoples in Dahomey."

² Questions of theology, such as the sense of sin, while needing study in the light of psychology, are too vast to be dealt with in this book.

by various research workers; some have dug much deeper than others. It is not always possible to obtain such complete information as one would desire. Sometimes the information recorded differs from what one would have expected. For example, it is believed by most West African tribes that the spirit of a man may be "eaten" by a witch, but that the personality or soul remains intact. A few writers state the contrary. Their remarks may be true, or may be founded upon misapprehension. I have not endeavoured to force all the information into identical categories. Where there is difference the fact is noted, and left as such in the hope that future field workers will be able further to check the point at issue.

We have to use the sole material available. It will never be possible to reveal all the beliefs of African tribes. Many are disappearing, or have already done so, under the powerful pressure of European, Christian, or Muhammadan influence. Others are surviving in distorted form. It is our task to record the facts, as now known, without prejudice.

My own acquaintance is partly with the French colonies, their peoples, and the literature concerning them. But I have the advantage, as an Englishman, of being able to give due place also to the researches of British writers. Comparative studies have become necessities, to help the general reader in studying African customs, and to save the colonial worker from parochialism. Where so much useful research has been achieved, in both French and British colonies, studies that look beyond political boundaries may assist the co-operation of the ruling powers, and help to further the unity of the African peoples.

CHAPTER 2

THE AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE

BEFORE proceeding to a detailed examination of West African ideas of soul and spirit, it will be as well to say a few words concerning a widespread African conception of life, which gives to their psychology of the human being, as well as of all existence, an orientation and an emphasis markedly different from those to which we are accustomed in our European thinking.

This metaphysical outlook has been clearly expressed by Father Tempels. He introduces his thesis in these words: "There are, in the mouths of black people, certain words which recur incessantly. These are those which express the supreme values. They are like variations upon a *leitmotiv* which is found in their language, their thought and in all their deeds and gestures.

"This supreme value is *force, forceful living, or vital force.*

"Of all the strange habits, of which we grasp neither the rhyme nor the reason, the Bantu say that they serve to acquire *vigour or vital force, to live forcibly*, to reinforce life, or to assure its continuity in their descendants."¹

This conception is so true, not only of the Bantu, but perhaps of most parts of Africa, that those who are acquainted with African ways, beliefs, and forms of speech, cannot but be struck both by the aptness of the expression and by long-familiar words and ideas which it brings into relief.

Force, power, energy, vitality, life, dynamism, these are the operative notions behind prayers to God, invocations of divinities, offerings to ancestors, everything that may be termed religion, including therein what we are pleased to designate "magic" or "medicine". The aim of all these practices being to strengthen and to affirm life.

A study of prayers, which have sometimes been recorded by careful anthropologists, whether addressed to divine or to beatified human beings, will reveal most often the chief characteristic to be a demand: "Give me life, force, increase of family." Consultation of the diviner, whether his method be simple or intricate, has the same aim: to learn how to reinforce life, and to ward off death and destruction.

It is for this reason that the African so often fails to under-

¹ *La Philosophie Bantoue*, p. 27.

stand the European insistence upon abandonment of magical practices, and in such a large percentage of cases continues to perform them surreptitiously. For to him there is a "good magic", quite distinct from "black magic"; the distinction being derived from the belief that good magic reinforces life, whereas black magic seeks to destroy. Magic, it may well be claimed, is a form of primitive science, aiming at setting in motion forces which God has placed in the world at the disposition of man who may learn, by open or by occult means, thereby to increase his own force, multiply his goods, swell his family, and lengthen his days.

All beings in the visible and invisible worlds possess some degree or type of force, whether we call it "soul" or not, animate or inanimate. Man being the crown of creation, in his own estimation, all these other forces may possibly be harnessed to serve the reinforcement of human vitality.

It is evident, then, that the whole tone of the philosophy of most African peoples is distinctly life-affirming. Here is no pessimism, or other-worldly way of negation. While a "spiritual" world, and a life after death, are most surely believed in, yet the aim of religion is positively "this-worldly". Recognition of this fact earlier on might have been most fruitful to missionary work, appealing to what is deepest in the African's mind. For they respond readily to such ideas as "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly".

In many African languages there are easily discoverable terms or phrases indicating a force, which is more than merely bodily. Translated into European languages this notion soon becomes apparent by the frequency of its recurrence, though perhaps it is more noticeable in French. I have often heard it in the Ivory Coast, as has our authority on the Congo, in the simple phrases: "*tu as la force*", "*il a gagné la force*".

The notion of force has a determining influence on the metaphysical concept of "being", and on the psychological understanding of "personality". Father Tempels expresses it thus: "We may conceive of the transcendental notion of 'being', by disentangling it from the attribute of its force, but not the Bantu; force is in his thought a necessary element of being, and the concept force is inseparable from the definition of being. . . . We have a *static* conception of being, they have a *dynamic* notion. . . . In Bantu thought, a being is what possesses force . . . *force is being, being is force.*"¹

¹ *Op. cit.*, pp. 31-32.

It might be said that European philosophy assumes that the universe is inanimate, following the presuppositions of materialistic science, whereas African philosophy assumes that there is life, or at least power, in all things; being thereby nearer to the modern conception of all-pervading energy.

This does not mean that Africans are "animists", in the older, somewhat pantheistic, sense of viewing the universe as animated by a world-force, an all-embracing God or power. This might be a Hindu or a European interpretation. But the African recognizes individuality, a hierarchy, good and evil, life and death. There are different forces, and diversity of beings. They accept individuality, as we do, always with the understanding that an individual "force" is meant.

This interpretation of African philosophy is much akin to that expressed by Dr. E. W. Smith in his work on the Ba-ila. On the other side of the continent of Africa similar beliefs are to be found. "We prefer the word Dynamism, because the beliefs and practices we wish to include under it have not necessarily any evil intention, and because it expresses simply what we believe to be the nature of their belief and practice—the belief in, and the practices associated with the belief in hidden, mysterious, super-sensible, pervading energy, powers, potencies, forces. We may call them what we please; there is no need to be more definite than the Ba-ila themselves; the more vague the name we give to the dynamis the nearer we shall come to the Ba-ila conception. . . . We have found no name for the power. The nearest, we think, is *bwanga*, which etymologically would mean 'the tying-up, the contents', or better, 'content—that which is contained in things'. It is commonly used of the medicines."¹

This dynamism runs through the operations of ritual, and the conceptions of the unseen. It is particularly interesting for the light that it sheds upon the working of "medicine". For while we can understand, to some extent, the individual forces proceeding from divinities and ancestors, yet our ingrained habit of regarding medicine as material hinders us from appreciating the influence of what appears to be "mere matter" and so is dubbed "magical".

Dr. Lucy Mair rejects such interpretations of the working of spiritual forces. She says, "Edwin Smith first tells us what the Ba-ila do explicitly believe, but he then goes on to describe the situation more accurately in terms of a mechanism which

¹ *Ila-speaking Peoples*, pp. 80-89.

would explain it. Sir James Frazer makes such an explanation a matter of duty. I do not believe the anthropologist is justified in thus crediting the peoples whom he is studying with explanations of their beliefs which they do not themselves offer, simply because, without some such explanation, there appears to us to be a flaw in the process of reasoning. The Baganda are content to say that such an action produces such a result; they do not inquire into the means or attempt to account for what happens by an analogy with physical processes. This indifference to logical consequences of one's assertions is a universal characteristic of minds untrained to abstract speculation."¹

This, however, does not disestablish the legitimacy of deduction and systematization; indeed, this may be a most useful function of the European, provided that he keeps the theory in strict accordance with the facts. Moreover, not all Africans are "pre-logical", any more than all Europeans are untrained theologians; there are individual African thinkers who have thought and taught far beyond the popular beliefs of the layman.

Some would say that Africans are "animists", because they consider all beings to have some sort of an indwelling force or "soul". This would be akin to the notion of "mana", familiar to us from the Melanesians. But we should still be faced with the problem as to how these forces act on beings. What is the process of interaction? How does the medicine operate on man? How can a witch kill at a distance? How can the dead be reborn? Does the "doctor" put power into his magical tool, or is it there already? Whence does a doctor acquire his power? From a teacher, or through an efficacious rite, or from a spirit?

African doctors know of herbal remedies for specific diseases, what we would call natural remedies, and we would be implying that these have no "spiritual" force. But these doctors use many other plants and materials, often apparently irrespective of any material virtue inherent in them. They seem to gather the plants at random, though it might be more correct to say "under guidance". But apparently the doctor is a discoverer of hidden power, a potency somehow lodged in the object, which he now taps.

These beliefs are not animistic, in the strict sense of attributing a "soul" to all matter. The doctor "speaks to the medicine itself", and its very name is important. Dr. Smith says, "Without the name the medicine would not be what it

¹ *An African People in the Twentieth Century*, 1934, pp. 256-257.

is with it. One might almost say that the name bears something of the same relation to the thing as 'soul' to 'body'."

We shall have, later, to refer to the "souls" or powers of animals and plants, and their relation to men and ancestors. But it may now be clear what a difference in understanding, both of men and things, is possible when this notion of vital force, or dynamism, is revealed. This would explain the trouble that early writers had to understand religion and "fetish", when the basic thought about life was not grasped. Mary Kingsley's various efforts to define the meaning and power of "fetish", for example, would have been greatly helped and clarified by the concepts of dynamism and forces.

This would explain also the apparent unintelligence which the African considers the European to have towards native beliefs. "White people cannot understand", so I have been told, "things that Africans know"; e.g. how a priest can draw down the power of lightning upon a house, how a hunter may become invisible or enter into a pact with an animal. It seems that they consider that there is something in our very make-up, a blind spot towards such erudite or occult matters. At least, one may now endeavour to comprehend the mentality, and appreciate the effort, whilst remaining open to conviction as to the result, and as to the average of successes over failures in these realms.

A few examples from the field of West Africa will illustrate the philosophy of life.

In the three language-groups with which I have most acquaintance, Yoruba, Ewe, and Twi, words for this force are in common use (such as *agbara*, *huhlon*, and *abusua*, respectively); whilst there are a number of other words, often translated "soul", which have a similar connotation of forcefulness and power.

The word *abusua* will be discussed in a later chapter, with reference to some of its implications. I may quote here an interesting example of the adoption of the term into Christian hymnology. The doctrine of the Trinity is expressed by the line of a hymn popular among the Adjukru, Akan of the Ivory Coast, as "One God in three powers" (*Nyam egn nyam, abusu niahan es*). This might suggest Sabellianism, were it not for the fact that *abusu* means more than a vague power, and can be extended to connote "soul" and even "clan".

In a later chapter it will be seen that one of the Ewe words for soul is *ye*. God (*Mawu*) has given to everything, they say,

a soul, a shadow, a *ye*. This is not a literal shadow, for behind and beyond the visible shadow of everything there is an invisible force which differentiates and energizes it, and without which it could not exist. God himself is called *ye-hwe*, which may be interpreted as "shadow is less" (*hwe* here meaning inferior). God is greater than all shadows and souls, as the soul of the world itself. Our invisible soul is the bond of union between us and God. So that the word for soul itself contains the thought of an energizing power from the divine.

It will be shown hereafter that, in beliefs connected with witchcraft, it is not generally thought in West Africa that the physical substance of a man's body is greatly injured. But it is the essence (*'kra*, soul, in the Twi language-group) which is thought to be harmed or removed. A number of anthropologists have been struck by the superficial similarity between this notion and the doctrine of transubstantiation, with a like separation of the accidents from the substance.

Dynamistic beliefs vitally affect the notions of divinities and supernatural beings, whether they be concretely personified as "gods", or regarded with awe as mighty forces. In the coastal regions, notably in Nigeria, the Earth seems to be personified to such an extent that it often has a cult, and we are justified in speaking of it as a "goddess"; e.g. among the Ibo.

In northern areas, it is rather the living power of the Earth that is revered. "All Tallensi stand in awe of the Earth. We have learnt that they speak of it as a 'living thing', meaning by this that it intervenes mystically in human affairs in the same way as ancestral spirits do. When they talk of the Earth they mention its remorseless punishment of sacrilege, and the things it prohibits, not its blessings. Yet it is the symbol to them of the forces that promote the common welfare of mankind without discrimination." But "there is no convincing evidence of the Earth being personified as a 'Goddess' in the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast." The totem animals are "the people of the Earth", being symbols of its force in regard to human life.¹

There is a word *nyam* or *nyama* (and like variants upon the root of *nyam*) which is very common in many parts of West Africa. Among the Akan, Nyam or Onyame is the supreme God, or the rain-god. The Bambara of the western Sudan use this word *nyama* (*gnama* in French orthography) for the force or spirit of man and nature.

¹ M. Fortes, *The Dynamics of Clanship among the Tallensi*, 1945, pp. 107n, 176.

Father Henry said that the *nyama* is "a force, a power, or if one wishes it again, an energy, a fluid possessed by every man, every animal, every living being, and which never disappears, for even after death it continues to exist. This energy, this fluid, is the envoy, the messenger of hatred, of vengeance, of justice, and it goes where a directing and ruling will sends it, taking rightly or wrongly misfortune, poverty, sickness, death. This word is constantly found on the lips of the Bambara."¹

The *nyama* always has this sense of forcefulness and power. A proverb says: "If the leopard says—Kill, We have no *nyama* that we can oppose to him." This is used also as an oblique reference to the mysterious power of the white man.

L. Tauxier says that it is an error to take literally the word "bad", which the Bambara sometimes use of their gods. "They are fearful, terrible, in the manner of the Greek Eumenides, the Latin Furies, the antique Nemesis, etc. That does not imply the idea of injustice, but on the contrary of a maximum, extreme justice. . . . At bottom, the difference between spirits and gods is not a difference of morality but a difference of power."²

Dynamistic concepts help to make more clear the relationships between different souls or attributes of man. The Jukun, of northern Nigeria, believe in a spirit or avenging ghost (*bwi*) whose relationship to the soul (*dindî*) is not always made clear; but it appears that the *bwi* personifies the dynamism of the living thing, and that this power continues after death to exert an influence comparable with that it gave out during mortal life. The Muhammadan Hausa have a like thought concerning a power which they call *kofi*, itself a popular personal name adopted by many West African tribes. Hausa people think that a man's *kofi* can receive some reinforcement if he sleeps on graves, or under a big tree, the idea being that he there receives the *kofi* of the dead tenant of the grave or of the spirit which inhabits the tree. Some of the Jukun try in similar ways to strengthen their *bwi*, and overcome the *bwi* of their enemies, and even plan to murder them without fear of retaliation if their own *bwi* has become stronger than that of their victim. Dr. Meek suggests a parallel with the Egyptian *sekhem*, the functions of which are not quite understood, but it may mean the force or immaterial energy of a man.³

¹ J. Henry, *L'âme d'un Peuple africain, Les Bambaras*, 1910, pp. 26-28.

² *La Religion Bambara*, 1927, pp. 54, 155n.

³ *A Sudanese Kingdom*, 1931, pp. 205-206.

The dynamistic idea may also help us to understand the manner in which gods and ancestors and notable men seem so often to be regarded with like awe and reverence, and often to receive similar appellations. As an example, one may refer to the other side of the continent, to the eastern and Nilotic Sudan, where the word Juok or Jok is used for the supreme God. As often happens, this word is used in a variety of ways, and sometimes changes its connotation from tribe to tribe, like *nyama*. Yet the underlying notion is usually that of something "numinous". Juok is one God, and yet is many; for a lucky man is said to have a good Juok, and an unfortunate man has an angry or bad Juok. White people are called Juok, because of the wonderful ways they have and the strange machines they use; flying in the air, living under the sea, making talking machines. Animals that act in strange ways, escaping after having been apparently mortally wounded, are Juok. In fact, all that is inexplicable is Juok.

For the Bari, of this region, it is Juokon who are the spirits of the dead and who are synonymous with *mian*, a power or force found in rivers, hills, animals, old men and sacred places.¹

Living, then, in a world of forces, all of which may affect man, directly or indirectly, the laws of African tribes englobed not only purely human affairs, but included reference to the working of forces which Europeans regard as beyond the control of their powers. Many tabus aimed at preventing the intervention of non-human forces in the life of the individual and of the whole tribe. Many rites aimed at encouraging such intervention when it was for the good of all. Laws aimed at procuring fertile crops, or at least at preventing the interruption of the working of nature.

The European too easily tends to ridicule the notion that upsetting the rhythm of human life, by administrative or missionary methods, is generally regarded by the people as liable to bring down a series of natural disasters. "The crops will not grow, hens will not lay, women will not bear children, the rain will not fall, lightning will destroy our houses, wild beasts will ravage our plantations, sickness and death will decimate our families." So often has this cry been heard, simply on account of the construction of a road in some part of the forest, or as a result of the neglect of the cult of a non-poisonous snake.

¹ C. G. Seligman, *Pagan Tribes of the Nilotic Sudan*, 1932, pp. 75-76, 275; J. H. Driberg, *The Lango*, 1923, pp. 233-239; T. T. S. Hayley, *The Anatomy of Lango Religion and Groups*, 1947.

All these natural calamities are regarded as possible, because some force is thwarted, neglected, or turned into evil channels. Perhaps such a world-view may have paralysed the mind, or prevented its free development; so it appears to us. But it is at least true that the supernatural sanctions imposed on individual and tribal conduct did serve to keep them from anti-social conduct in many ways, and to induce a respect for other human lives, and for all forms of life which were endued with dynamism.

No doubt many ill-founded superstitions will disappear before the teaching of scientific fact in the schools. We shall treat of the development of the best ideas into Christian thought in the closing chapter. But it would be a pity if the African's spiritual and living world-view were replaced by a superficial and purely materialistic outlook. This is already happening. In the trading centres, mining towns, ports, administrative cities of Africa, the loosening of the old sanctions is showing itself in blatant scepticism, greedy materialism, and the crudest superstitions. Yet underneath there is still, most often, the outlook upon life inculcated from the earliest days in the villages. The growing belief in witchcraft among the literate is an indication that Africans still believe strongly in the effect of forces, unseen and distant, that may attack their inner being and sap their vitality.

CHAPTER 3

THE BODY AND ITS POWERS

EUROPEAN psychology is much concerned with the material body, and the study of the mind is conducted by some schools of psychology largely with concepts derived from the physical body. Africans, generally, distinguish in man the visible, perceptible body from the "thing in itself". By means of their philosophy of force we may understand the "thing in itself" as designating the real inner nature, the essential being, or the inner force of the object or man.

The language used to express this concept may mislead by its apparent materialism. The African might say that "in each thing is another thing", and "in every man there is a little man". And the European interpreter would be led astray if he imagined that this means that there is a "manikin", a small reproduction of the material body living inside it; a notion that has been spread by some of the writings of Sir James Frazer. In West Africa, at least, a wrong impression would thus be given of those complex entities which are loosely denominated "souls". The African may use periphrases and metaphorical expressions, but this is simply in order to bring out the distinction between the temporary and visible phenomenon, and the noumenon, the invisible and intrinsic being of the force itself.

In the *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, it is shown that many primitive peoples do not contrast the body and the soul so distinctly as does the European. "The contrast under regard, in the more primitive intention, is not that of material and spiritual substances (for neither of these categories is recognized) but it is very near to the reflective distinction between form and energy; the primitive man everywhere makes a quick discrimination between the perceptual aspects of things and their powers and strengths . . . everywhere his interest centres in the hidden powers of things, which are for him their prime realities, and it is no marvel to find that everywhere he figures these powers under some evanescent analogy of the senses (the blood, the breath, the shade). It is these analogic figures of the primitive imagination that bear the names usually transcribed by the word 'soul'—itself, doubtless, originally, like *anima* and other classical equivalents, a word of the same class."¹

¹ Vol. xi, p. 725.

When some European writers try to distinguish the soul from the body, they find it difficult to explain where "the man" himself has gone, when body and soul are separated. Translating this directly into African languages, we encounter great obstacles in speaking of the soul of man in this way at all. It is true that Africans often distinguish between the body, the shadow, and the breath. Breath is the visible sign of life, but it is perishable, and it does not correspond to what we understand as soul, i.e. that which subsists when the bodily breath and shadow have disappeared. Indeed, Africans would not say that what subsists after death is a part of a man; it is rather "himself", "the man himself", and this is "the little man" who was hidden behind the outward appearance, the man himself whose existence continues in one way or another into the afterworld.

Father Tempels puts the point clearly. "It is the '*muntu*' who, at death, has left the living. It seems to me improper to translate this usage of '*muntu*' by *the man*. The '*muntu*' certainly possesses a visible body, but this body is not the '*muntu*'. 'The *muntu*', a native explained to me one day, is what you designate in French by 'the person' and not what you mean by 'the man'. '*Muntu*' then would signify this vital force endued with intelligence and will. This meaning would give logical sense to the assertion which I got one day from a black man, saying: 'God is a great *muntu*'; this would mean then, God is *the* great *Person*; that is to say The great, powerful, and reasonable living force. The '*bintu*' are indeed what we call *things*; but following Bantu philosophy they are beings, that is to say *forces*, not *endowed with reason, not living*.'¹

In much African thought, the physical frame is a force, a vehicle for the inner man himself, but not identified with the real man, or confused with any of his "souls". His personality is spiritual and, as we shall see later, his spirit may be compared with an Over-Soul, or guardian genius, whose real life is spent in touch with the supreme Spirit, and which may not be greatly or permanently affected by events which disturb its physical and mental forms.

Yet the body is not a mere empty shell; it is filled with energy which may be hurt or helped by other forces. Belief in the dynamistic powers of the body are almost universal in Africa. Even in Muhammadan Morocco whereas the souls of the ordinary dead, as distinct from the saints, are not believed to appear to the living or to influence their fate for good or ill,

¹ *Op. cit.*, pp. 35-36.

and therefore are of no practical use, yet their corpses and physical appurtenances are often employed in magical practices because they are thought to be saturated with destructive energy. In the preparation of good and bad charms the hands of recently buried persons may be used and these communicate their force, it is thought, to the noxious mixtures.¹

The importance attached to bodily appurtenances: hair, nails, spittle, excreta, washing-water, tooth-sticks, sleeping mats, and anything that has been in intimate contact with the body, has been referred to in my previous book. Great care is taken of their disposal, as they may be used by the perpetrators of black magic, and they are surrounded with tabus and protective rites, in West Africa.

The umbilical cord is held in esteem by many peoples. Some bury it under a special tree, the "*palmier du nombril*", so called by A. Le Hérissé of Dahomey. It is said that the Baganda of Uganda used to treasure the royal umbilical cord, and it was held by a medium when she was about to pronounce an oracular utterance. The Baganda also thought that the spirit clung most closely to the lower jawbone, and would follow it anywhere; hence jawbones were treasured, royal ones in their temples, and were thought to bring good fortune. In West Africa the jawbones of animals killed in the hunt are often kept and embedded in mounds to be seen at the entrance to a village. Perhaps it was a similar force which gave Samson the power to smite a thousand men with the jawbone of an ass.²

One of the most important parts of the body is the blood, and the heart as its organ. The blood is closely associated with the soul, and is the vital principle of many sacrifices. "The blood is the life" (cf. Deut. 12: 23). But outward similarity of blood sacrifice may conceal inner differences of intention. There is a clear distinction between propitiatory and communion sacrifice. The murder of victims in funeral and memorial ceremonies has often been termed "human sacrifice"; but here the blood has no propitiatory significance, and the intent was not strictly sacrificial, for the victims executed were sent as messengers to the departed, or as companions and servants to one recently deceased. Often their blood was not shed; they were poisoned or strangled. But other sacrifices were made with the clear object of placating the spirits with blood, or to

¹ E. Westermarck, *Ritual and Belief in Morocco*, 1926, ii, p. 552.

² J. Roscoe, *The Baganda*, 1911, pp. 282-299. A. Le Hérissé, *L'Ancien Royaume du Dahomey*, Paris, 1911.

make atonement for known or unknown wrong. Yet again, not only did a few gods dislike blood, but other than bloody sacrifices might be offered as propitiations. But always the "soul" of the offering, however slain or presented, was thought to go to the spirit concerned.

The blood plays an important part in connexion with the personality. The Akan distinguish between the "blood-soul" (*abusua*, or *mogya*), and the spirit or "seminal soul" (*ntoro*). This distinction is based upon the simple physical differences of woman and man respectively. The *ntoro* is the semen, and is therefore male, white, and considered to be the means of transmitting the totemic spirit. The *abusua* is the blood, from the woman's menstrual flow, and is therefore female, red, and transmits the blood- or clan-soul. Every man and woman possesses these two elements, which are thought to have combined to create him. But the blood- or clan-soul being only transmissible through the female this makes for matrilineal inheritance, and the overshadowing of the father by the maternal uncle. The dead, it is thought, can only be reborn in the clan (*abusua*) to which they belonged in a previous life; thus causing a system of cross-cousin marriages, complicated by the inheritance of the name from the father's element (the *ntoro*).

The blood- and body-soul is closely related to a more ethereal type of soul (*'kra*), and their connection even seems to be thought of as prolonged into the world after death, for it seeks reincarnation into a woman of the same blood-clan. Yet the role of the male in conception is recognized; there is no ignorance of the results of coitus, and for rebirth to take place it is believed that both *abusua* and *ntoro* must participate.

The totemic spirit (*ntoro*) is also thought to be reborn, possibly in a different blood-body, but through a man belonging to the same *ntoro*, and in this way names are inherited. In the olden days great efforts were made among the Ashanti to secure the marriage of cousins, who would inherit both the blood-soul and the name of ancestors. This will be referred to again when treating of reincarnation.

A woman could not pass on a name or totemic spirit, but only her blood-soul; while a man could only do the reverse. It is for this reason that the Ashanti had a proverb: "A woman has no soul" (*sunsum* or *ntoro*); she inherited a "small kind" of soul from her father, but was incapable of passing on more than her blood.¹

¹ R. S. Rattray, *Ashanti*, 1923, pp. 45 ff.; *Religion and Art in Ashanti*, 1927, pp. 318 ff.

The Ewe and Yoruba also consider the blood to be important. They say that the gods (*vudu*, *orisha*, respectively) ask for blood in sacrifice, because there is an invisible force or principle (*ye*) in the blood; the shedding of blood liberates this force and sends it to the gods. This idea is widespread in West Africa; the people are not so grossly superstitious or idolatrous as is sometimes imagined by superficial observers. The African realizes that his sacrifices are not consumed materially by the god, but are often appropriated by the priest, but he believes that there is an immaterial essence in the body which goes to the divinity, as the soul leaves the body, leaving only the material accidents to be consumed by man.

The Ewe *ye* (soul, power, symbol) is roughly equivalent to a Yoruba word (*ashe*) which has caused lexicographers some trouble by the variety of shades of meaning attached to it: power, virtue, effect, law, imprecation, one might add "mana". This word indicates the vital force, the power of every divinity, of all animate beings, of all inanimate things. It corresponds, partly, to the Arabic *baraka*, the holiness or blessed virtue, about which Dr. Westermarck has written at such length, and which is used not only in North Africa but in the Sudan, and among Hausa and neighbouring tribes of the West Coast.¹

The Ewe and Yoruba think that the blood is one of the most vital things in the world, and blood has a soul. Proverbs express this: "Have you not seen my *ye*; do you think I have water in my veins?" "The blood is the *ashe* of all that breathes". The blood, in its inner essence, is like a soul; it is also compared to the sap of trees which gives them life. "The blood has created us, it has animated us", says a proverb.

The Ewe have a thought comparable to the Levitical prohibition against eating the blood with the flesh. They say, "Nobody eats the blood with the flesh." In communal sacrifices, the blood is poured out to the god; the meat is then eaten by the suppliants, but only after being cooked. Even if blood remains in the meat, yet the process of cooking changes its colour; that which makes it red disappears, like the soul leaving the body. Modern informants will say that cooking is done for hygienic purposes, but the older ones know better.

In offering sacrifice, force is transferred to the god through the blood, with the aim of permitting the divinity to use this accession of power to put away evil from his worshippers. Prayers ask for the entrance of the force (*ashe*) of the god into

¹ *Op. cit.*, I, Ch. I-III.

the house of the worshippers; they wish to "hold" the god, and pray to him "hold me". Informants accept the comparison with a blood transfusion as a simile of what they believe occurs invisibly when they offer blood; the god receives the soul of the blood and transfuses it into the sick one, who thus acquires new force.

Two distinct aims of sacrifice thus become apparent. The sacrifice (Ewe *vo*; Yoruba *ébo*) seeks first to drive away evil, and is an act of expulsion. It further endeavours to establish reciprocal relations and harmonious feelings between man and his god, and is a rite of exchange. The object of the exchange is the passing of spiritual force from the victim to the god, and from the god back to the sacrificer.

The Fõn-Ewe have a word which designates the shadow that is nearest to the material body, the core of the shadow (*wēsagū*). It is difficult to determine this precisely, and explanations are contradictory. It seems probable that it is the name which is given to the blood-soul (*yε*) at death. The word means "messenger", and it is said to report to God at the moment of the death of the body; yet it is also said to remain in the grave when the larger shadow disappears. In this it resembles the relationship existing between the Akan *abusua* and *kra*.¹

It is difficult to obtain reliable information as to similar conceptions held by other West African peoples. The Jukun, of northern Nigeria, call the physical body of man *adi*, and this comes into the world in the company of a spiritual self called *adidi* or *dindî*. At death the body becomes a corpse (*aki*, a word which is also employed both for the spirit and for the cult of the dead), but the *dindî* does not die, but goes to the world beyond. The life of a man is called *chîdi*, which means "head of the body". The centre of life and thought, however, is in the heart and not in the head.

The Jukun, like the Ewe, and many other West African peoples, consider that thought and feeling are centred in the heart, that it is the heart that thinks and passes the thought on to the head or out by the mouth. The Yoruba word for soul (*òkan*) means also the physical heart. When one protests that the heart is but an organ of muscle and lymph, the African turns round and asks why Europeans speak of "good-hearted people", and why the Bible mentions the fool saying "in his heart"? The West African also speaks of courage as coming from a strong heart, of loving with the heart, of black or white hearts. Dr. Meek compares this with the Egyptian conception

¹ *La Géomancie*, pp. 334-335; 379-380.

of the heart (the *ab*) as centre of life and thought. This is not a consistent rule, however, for the Jukun also say that a man has "no head at home", if his memory is poor.¹

The Jukun do not regard the shadow as very important, but merely as a reflection of his soul (*dindî*), as a man sees the reflection of his body in a mirror. The breath ceases at death, and has no spiritual existence.

The Bambara, of the western Sudan, believe that the spiritual or vital powers are manifested in a number of parts or organs of the body. The liver, stomach, heart, breath, look, head, shadow, penis, all are means of the expression of the spirit. The spirit is in all the body and all its parts, but it is particularly attached to certain places.

There appear to be "doubles", or vital principles, connected with various organs. One is in the stomach, and the word which is used for stomach is also used for courage and conscience. The Malinke, a tribe of Upper French Guinea related to the Bambara, situate one of the souls in the stomach, and say that a person attacked by a witch has had the "stomach eaten", and this is understood in a spiritual sense, though doubtless with physical concomitants.

The heart has also a spiritual correlative. The word for heart means both the physical organ which circulates the blood, and also morals, habit, faults. A solemn oath normally contains the phrase, "take my heart and liver if I betray my oath", meaning "destroy me by taking away these two vital centres".

The liver is thought, by Bambara and Ivory Coast tribes, to have a spiritual double or power. These peoples say that when witches devour the spiritual part of man, it is only when they get to the double of the liver that the man dies.

The head is the seat of decision, will, pride. An active man has an ardent head, a tenacious man is hard-headed. The eye contains the look, which is a spiritual property. The words for eye, look, breath, and soul appear to be all akin (*nye, nyena, nya, nyana*). The look of a man may augur good or evil. The "evil eye" is well known to all Sudanese. A much-revered god is called "great black eye".

The breath, naturally, is connected with the spiritual constitution. He that has breath is living. The breath seems to be regarded as a spiritual fluid or essence, something like the look, which can perform good or evil deeds. A man may have an "evil mouth", as he has an evil eye.

¹ *A Sudanese Kingdom*, pp. 202-203.

The shadow is the nearest approach to a double, and has the same name (*dya*). The Bambara does not think of the shadow as caused by the interception of light, but as an emanation from the body manifested by the shadow in sunlight and by a reflection in water. (This is similar to children's ideas, as shown by Piaget, in *The Child's Conception of the World*.) The shadow is a spiritual power common to all beings, and while it is not the soul, yet it appears to have some sort of being. The Bambara are convinced that a man's shadow can be stolen, and hence they were formerly afraid of being photographed, fearing thereby to lose a part of their being, which would be transferred from them to the photographic print.¹

We may compare this description with what Dr. Junod says of the thought of some South African Bantu, on the situation of the psychic faculties. The Thonga place patience in the heart, hatred in the spleen; the heart is the seat of intellectual gifts; the decisions of the will come from the heart; the chest and not the lungs is the residence of intelligence and of eloquence. The conscience is in the diaphragm, but the head and the intestines do not seem to be the abode of any particular faculty.²

A further very important part of the personality is the name. This may be compared with the Egyptian *ren*. No name is a mere name. There are public and private names, and the names of seniors must often not be used by juniors in addressing them. This is because the name expresses the individual character of a man. It is not a mere handle, but shares in the spiritual reality of man's being. We have seen that Dr. Smith makes this point even concerning medicines, that the name makes or completes the medicine, and is in a comparable relation to the thing as the soul is to the body.

Father Tempels stresses the different ways in which an African or a European will answer questions as to their name. The European will answer directly, accepting or rejecting the name by which he is called, when the questioner is uncertain of his identity. But the African will not give a direct and categorical reply, but will accept indirectly: "Father", "Master", "I here", rather than a simple yes or no.

In baptisms and the use of Christian names, one finds the difference between a foreign, imposed name, and the one which belongs to the person in his very self. Asked whether such-and-

¹ Tauxier, *op. cit.*, pp. 19-24; Henry, *op. cit.*, pp. 41 ff.; C. Montell, *Les Bambara de Ségou et du Kaarta*, 1924, pp. 119 ff.; H. Bazin, *Dictionnaire Bambara-Français*, 1906, pp. 464, 552.

² *Mœurs et Coutumes des Bantous*, 1936, ii, p. 316.

such is his child's Christian name, the father will answer with a direct yes; but asked as to his native name, he will reply with the more profound "it is he".¹

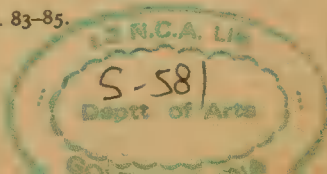
There are numbers of names which an individual may bear; often three, but varying according to the locality. One is an "inner" name, of being or life, which is never lost. A second is given on some special occasion of accession of force, such as initiation or circumcision; the Christian name should be assimilated to this. A priest or chief will receive a name, the old "strong names" of kings, on undertaking office, with its powers and responsibilities. Then there are names chosen by oneself. It is not thought unnatural for one who works for a European to take a foreign name, for he thereby receives some of the strange force of the European.

The inner name, which cannot be changed, and constitutes part of individuality, comes from the clan. Newborn children are called by a name chosen from clan names, from names of ancestors who are believed to be reincarnate in them.

We have seen that the Akan inherit names from the father's side, from the totemic spirit (*ntoro*). The explanation given for the practice of cross-cousin marriages was that it was "because of names". A child must return to the same blood-clan (*abusua*), by rebirth through the mother's side; but if it could also have a totemic spirit of the father's clan, then that would be the supreme felicity, for thus the names of the ancestors would be kept within the clan.

The Yoruba and Ewe, though they do not practise matrilineal inheritance, yet lay the same emphasis upon names. The *orile* is a Yoruba man's family name, called also totem, sometimes the name of an animal, or of a mythical ancestor. The *abiso*, now often termed the "christening" name by both Yoruba and Ewe, is given at a ceremony held shortly after the birth of the child, at which all the family is consulted. A proverb says that: "The state of the house must be considered first before the child is named." This name is given by grandparents or parents, and refers either to the child itself or to the family, sometimes to a god. A child may be "born with a name", if there is some special circumstance attending its birth, which is commemorated in the name: a twin, or a child born after twins, a breech baby, one born with a caul, or any other unusual presentation, one born on a festival day, etc. Attributive names or nicknames are given, and are often those by which

¹ Tempels, *op. cit.*, pp. 83-85.



the child is best known in public; they express what it is hoped the child will become: "One who causes joy", "One who wins a fight", "One of select birth".¹

Sometimes nicknames are given to hide the identity of the child. I have heard one called "banana" (*oklib* in Adjukru), with the idea that a spirit of disease seeking a human victim would take no notice of a child called after a fruit. Others are called by insulting names, especially if they are sickly, or have followed several children who have died (the Yoruba *abiku*, "born to die"); all this with the aim of protecting the child. The same motive prompts parents to pretend that they do not know the exact number of their children, lest disease steal the youngest.

The study of names is long and involved. All that we need to put forward here is the vital connexion of the name with the very life itself. It is truly a dangerous thing to "take the name in vain", and some of the gravest insults are those which simply say "your father", "your mother". It is said that the Ibibio, before going to war, used to call upon the "soul-names" of the most redoubtable of their enemies, bidding their souls to leave their bodies, so that in the battle the bodies of these warriors would be without soul and so powerless to fight.²

Before leaving the subject of the body, reference may be made to the view of some psycho-analysts (e.g. Dr. E. Jones) who have suggested that the idea of the soul may have arisen not merely from breath, but from flatulence; and that the comparisons which the Ancients made between soul and breath arose simply from the ideas of children and primitive people about intestinal gases. Children, Dr. Jones has said, are not interested in ordinary breathing, because it is regular and automatic. But they are very much attracted by the strange intestinal gases. He argues that if the principal ideas of primitive peoples originate in the mentality of the child, and if the universal nature of breath as the transmitter of life is accepted, then it is permissible to deduce that this "breath" really designates the intestinal gases. He further suggests that since in mythology fecundation is often symbolized by a breath, children have a similar idea. This breath is a symbol of flatulence.

Other psychologists have pointed out, however, that while the youngest children do confuse normal breath with the gases

¹ S. Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas*, 1937, pp. 87-89
² P. A. Talbot, *Life in Southern Nigeria*, 1923, p. 233.

of the digestive tube, yet this is simple identity, and does not mean that the one is the symbol of the other. The outside wind and the human breath are not symbols of flatulence, but the child thinks of all the air in his body as coming from the wind, and also of the wind as issuing from the body. It is not through the part finally played in the child's idea of birth that breath has become the symbol of soul and thought, but rather because air in general has a large part in the child's thought about the world, and particularly about movement. Breath being connected with wind, so wind is conceived of as participating in thought, as in all movement. If there are connexions with flatulence, these are secondary and caused by the absence of differentiation between the intestinal gases and the breath of the body.¹

- West African peoples can no longer be called primitive, in the sense that their thoughts about the world are the most elementary and closest to the mentality of children. Indeed the fact that one can quite justifiably talk of Bantu philosophy, shows that their thought is developed and logical, even if often different from our own. The distinctions made, at least by thoughtful priests, between an external sacrifice and its inner essence, show considerable subtlety. So that it cannot be expected that hypotheses of child mentality and primitive thought-constructions can always be substantiated from West African customs and ideas.

I have found no trace of connexion between intestinal gases and the soul. We have seen that it is realized that the breath ceases to exist at death, whereas the soul is always believed to subsist. Many physical functions are important, but not related to the soul directly. Flatulence is sometimes regarded as being as serious as breaking an oath, particularly in sickness; the Ewe say the remedy for this is to cleanse the mouth with fresh and salt water, and spit it out to the four points of the compass. Similarly to break wind is considered disgraceful, and in the past was the occasion of execution or suicide, if the accident occurred on a great occasion. Rattray quotes several instances: one of a chief who committed suicide after thus inadvertently disgracing himself before his superiors, and another of a priestess who for this cause was driven out of the priesthood, and made to give sheep to cleanse the palace and the temple. Even when a party of friends were eating together, a person who so offended was made to serve as a table to the others or, if they wished to

¹ E. Piaget, *The Child's Conception of Causality*, E.T. 1930, pp. 57-58.

overlook the fault, they would hide their laughter lest the man be overcome with shame; so great is the power of ridicule. But there is no thought of connexion with the soul.¹

While the body is not the person, yet in West Africa there is no Manichean dualism, no suggestion that the body is evil and to be renounced or tortured for the sake of spiritual refinement. The body is good, physical life is clung to, and every effort is exerted in perpetuating it. The life after death is real to the African, but it is usually regarded as a life of cold and shade, and speedy return to the warm earth is the greatest reward for the righteous.

Sex is held to be good and, for some, sexual indulgence would seem to be the greatest good of life. The most unrestrained licence is indulged in by some tribes, upon particular occasions such as funerals and fertility rites. This has been fully established by the thorough investigations of anthropologists during the last two or three decades, and can no longer be attributed to the lurid imagination of missionaries, as has been the fashion of some globe-trotters who have maintained the view that Africans are more frigid and restrained than ourselves.

Celibacy is never cherished for its own sake, and childlessness is the greatest curse. Chastity is practised at times for some greater benefit, because of the requirements of some greater force, some god whose favour or possession is sought. Polygamy is largely explicable from the laudable desire to "multiply and fill the earth". Unhappily polygamy and unbridled sexual indulgence seem to defeat their own ends, and to diminish rather than to enhance fertility; this provides one of the strongest inducements to monogamy the more it is understood.

Round the physical body many seers, who have specially enlightened eyes to perceive the invisible, claim to distinguish what we would call an aura or halo. In this way they can tell whether a person is good or bad, and if he harbours peaceful or anti-social thoughts in his "heart". Witches are believed to give off red smoke from their heads, and as they fly abroad at night they are said to give off a glowing light, like the multitudes of fire-flies that so often fill the night air of Africa. Red is the colour of jealousy, and black that of evil. The best people have a white aura, and are full of light.

¹ *Ashanti Law and Constitution*, 1929, pp. 372-373.

CHAPTER 4

THE PERSONALITY-SOUL

WHEN one approaches the question of soul and spirit, as distinct from the body and its attributes, considerable complexity of thought and expression is found. Terms such as soul, spirit, personality, genius, may be used, and there is often confusion in the minds both of the African exponent and the European interpreter as to the meaning and limitations of these terms.

The confusion in usage is not confined to Africa, and our own language is not infrequently ambiguous. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the metaphysical conception of the soul as "The vital, sensitive, or rational principle in plants, animals, or human beings. Frequently with distinguishing adjectives, as vegetative, sensible, or sensitive, and rational or reasonable." This is followed by quotations from Jonson, Shakespeare, and Howells, who speak of three souls.¹

Common usage tends to confuse the moral and intellectual part of man with the personality, and even with departed spirits. We speak of noble souls, or mean souls, of not having a soul to speak to, of souls perishing in a shipwreck, of All Souls' Day. Let us leave aside the last-named practical identification of the soul with the disembodied spirit of a departed person; that will be discussed in a later chapter. As a guide through European thought, one may accept the definition of the soul given by the *Oxford Dictionary* as "the principle of thought and action in man, commonly regarded as an entity distinct from the body; the spiritual part of man in contrast to the purely physical. Also occasionally, the corresponding or analogous principle in animals."

We cannot import European and Asiatic concepts wholesale into African thought, without running the risk of grave misapprehension and distortion. The African thought-world is based upon different ideas from our own. This may be illustrated from the profound reflections of Dr. E. W. Smith. One might speak, he says, of the Ba-ila Ego as composed of heart, shadow, spirit, or genius, name, and breath; but this would be over-elaboration and misrepresentation. Shadow, breath and wind are not three distinct entities, even if that might appear so

¹ Vol. ix, pp. 460-463.

from phrases which speak of a man's shadow being stolen by witches; but the people will deny that the self and the shadow are identical. Rather do these words serve but partially to express the mysterious nature of man. For man is strange, as mysterious as shadow, wind, and breath. "Can we formulate an explanation that will cover all they think and say? Shall we say that a man is full of soul-stuff just as the world of Nature is pervaded by those mysterious forces manifest in medicines, etc; . . . This soul-stuff is ethereal, impersonal, animating the whole body, giving it life. The essence of it may, with the aid of drugs, be separated from the body and be hidden for safety, as an 'external soul' in other things. Into the body comes the spirit from the spirit-world, which gives the person his identity, his name, his position, all that we mean by personality."¹

Dr. C. M. Doke speaks in a somewhat similar strain of the Lamba of Rhodesia. The person is different from the body, but is perceptible through the speech and breath: "I hesitate to use the term 'soul' to indicate this, as the Lamba conception is so different." The person is practically synonymous with the life, which causes the heart to beat, and when a man dies they say "the person has let go his life". At death the person goes away to the place of the dead in the west, while the spirit hovers round the village awaiting reincarnation. The spirit is part of the human constitution, and does not go to the world of the dead. While nothing can destroy the person, yet the spirit can be destroyed by fire, and hence witches' bodies are burnt. The clan is connected with the spirit, by the Lamba but not with the person.²

In his rather diffuse book on the Bantu soul, Willoughby says that "attempts to prove that Bantu religion is polypsychic, like that of ancient Egypt, are not convincing. Theories of soul and 'soul-substance', or of a number of souls, in the same body, are sophisticated attempts to explain a quasi-sacred logical incongruity that never troubled the unsophisticated folk who first uttered it. According to an ancient magical interpretation of the world, a person, whether in or out of the body, may be present in more than one place or form at the same time; and when the slowly amassing thought and experience of many minds made this notion a strain upon the imagination, some astute exegete among the faithful tried to harmonize the

¹ *Op. cit.*, ii, pp. 161-163.

² *The Lambas of Northern Rhodesia*, 1931, pp. 230-233.

ancestral aphorisms with the newer conception of life, and thus bring peace to those who were peacefully inclined." This is a necessary warning; but it does not meet the fact that the African himself often makes a distinction in the parts of his psychic being, by the different words that he uses to describe the faculties. Other authorities on the Bantu, such as Junod, speak of the human being as double. Eiselen says the soul is like our idea of the "personality" of a man, but associated with the breath and often with the shadow. There is a common belief that a corpse cannot cast a shadow, since the soul has left it.¹

These ideas of other African peoples are referred to, so as to give some comparison and also contrast with West Africans. There are basic beliefs common to many tribes, and some probably more ancient than the Egyptian dynasties. But the variations are numerous. Narrow definitions become suspect, and the best thing is to examine the evidence without pursuing deductions too far.

Many West African tribes appear to believe in three or even four entities or powers, which may be called souls or spirits. This reveals some profundity of reflection, although it is not organized or the product of any orthodox school of teachers.

There is a quadruple soul, says one, and others could be suggested to correspond to the various powers of man; yet the four are united in one. All souls come from God, but they do not form God, as far as we know. This pantheistic thought has not been developed, and one is content with affirming that all souls come from God. All souls are subject to God, and have no power of their own without him. Sin is a fact, and springs from the neglect of the laws which God gives. Under the supreme Creator, the lesser spirits create their lower souls and send them into the world. These thoughts will be explored later on.

There gradually emerges a distinction between what might be called the soul or personality, and a higher soul or spirit. Beyond these is often a guardian genius or over-soul. The personality-soul is more outward, human, and individual. The spirit-soul is inward, and more detached from the vicissitudes of mortal existence. But one still needs to utter the warning that ideas differ from tribe to tribe, and the very terminology used may vary with the area in which it occurs.

¹ W. C. Willoughby, *The Soul of the Bantu*, 1928, Ch. I; W. M. Eiselen and I. Schapera, in *The Bantu-speaking Tribes of South Africa*, 1937, pp. 248 ff.

LOWER GOLD COAST AND IVORY COAST

Among the Ashanti the *sunsum* is one soul, that commonly seems to designate the personality or ego, particularly as expressed in the appearance and individual characteristics of a man. It is the outward or worldly part of a man, as contrasted with the inward and divine spirit-soul ('*kra* or '*okara*'). The '*kra*' aims at entering into experience by the *sunsum*, if there is suitable preparation made for it. Sin may exist on the side of the *sunsum*, but not in the world of the '*kra*'. So that the *sunsum*, in Akan thought, embodies a form of consciousness, the sensible soul, but it is the imperfect vehicle for the expression of the '*kra*' which awaits due preparation for its entry into consciousness.¹

The activities ascribed to this *sunsum*, which we will now call "soul" as distinct from the '*kra*' or "spirit", may help to clarify the conception held by the Akan people.

Proverbs are useful pointers to meaning. "The soul is what protects you", "my soul is strong", "my soul is heavy", "my soul stands at my back"; these are common expressions, though similar words might be used of the spirit. On the other hand, the soul is thought to flit about; Rattray calls it a "volatile soul". A woman will say that her husband's soul has caught her, but she would not say this of his spirit. The soul is said to sit at the door, but not the spirit. If a man's wife is unfaithful, his spirit will inform his soul, which will then seize his wife and make her sicken and die.²

The Akan, like many other tribes, believe that during sleep it is the soul which wanders about, leaving the body under the protection of the spirit. The soul has many adventures, meeting other souls whom it may fight, and so it may become unwell and even die. It may have sexual intercourse with women's souls, which may be fatal if the woman is dead and is one with whom the dreamer had such relations during her life; such soul adventures may bring the dreamer into court if he brags openly of having relations with another man's wife, and he will be punished as for actual adultery. When a man dies his widow must stay by his dead body until he is buried; but she is thought to be in great danger during this time, for if her husband's soul returns to have intercourse with her it is thought that she will be barren for ever after.

Reference has been made to a proverb which says that a

¹ J. B. Danquah, *The Akan Doctrine of God*, 1944, pp. 87, 117.

² *Religion and Art in Ashanti*, pp. 93, 154, 318.

woman has no soul. This is qualified by the explanation which attributes to her a small kind of *sunsum* inherited from her father; but she cannot pass on any *sunsum* to her children, but only her blood-soul or power (*abusua*).

A most revealing interpretation of the character of the soul was given to Dr. Rattray, in connexion with the licence that has been allowed at the Apo ceremony in the Gold Coast. "You know that everyone has a *sunsum* (soul) that may get hurt or knocked about or become sick, and so make the body ill. Very often, although there may be other causes, e.g. witchcraft, ill-health is caused by the evil and hate that another has in his head against you. Again, you too may have hatred in your head against another, because of something that person has done to you, and that, too, causes your *sunsum* to fret and become sick. Our forebears knew this to be the case, and so they ordained a time, once every year, when every man and woman, free man and slave, should have freedom to speak out just what was in their head, to tell their neighbours just what they thought of them, and of their actions, and not only their neighbours, but also the king or chief. When a man has spoken thus freely, he will feel his *sunsum* cool and quieted, and the *sunsum* of the other person against whom he has now openly spoken will be quieted also."¹

When a man dies his soul leaves his body for ever. Some say that it quits the dying man or woman wherever they may be, and goes to bid farewell to the sacred lake Bosomtwe. The stool, which during life is held to be intimately associated with its owner's soul, on his death becomes a shrine. Prayers and offerings are made at the stool, and the departed soul may be invoked to come into it on special occasions. Fetters are sometimes fixed on to a stool, with the aim of fixing the owner's soul there.

The well-known story of the Golden Stool of Ashanti, the emblem of national unity, illustrates this belief. The priest Anotchi told King Osai Tutu that the stool contained the soul (*sunsum*) of the Ashanti nation, and that their force, health, and bravery were contained in the stool. He said that if the stool were captured or destroyed, then the Ashanti nation would sicken and lose its vital force, just as a man sickens whose soul has been injured and captured. Hence the desperate attempts to retain and hide the stool, and the horror at its desecration.

¹ *Ashanti*, p. 153.

Everything in the world is said to have its soul (*sunsum*), whether it be what we should term animate or inanimate. But not everything has a spirit (*'kra*), but only men. In addition to their own souls, trees and stones may be indwelt by other spiritual beings, human or divine.¹

Among the Gã, of the Gold Coast seaboard, Dr. M. J. Field tells us, the personality is called *susuma*, evidently related to the Twi *sunsum*. The Gã have adopted a number of religious concepts and terms from the Akan to the west and north, apparently, although traditionally they are related to the Ewe and Yoruba peoples to the east. The personality that dominates others, such as the influence exerted by an orator, is the power put forth by the soul. When a thief is caught red-handed his soul is seized by that of the pursuer, being paralysed with fear.

In the Gã Bible, *susuma* is translated as "soul", and from other usages we find similar thoughts to those of the Ashanti. During sleep this soul leaves the body, while the spirit (*kla*) stays behind to maintain life. If the soul did not return the man would die, and the same would occur if both soul and spirit left only temporarily, or if the spirit departed permanently. It is held here, as by so many other tribes, that a sleeping person must be awakened gradually, lest the soul may not find its way back to the body in time. When a child moves about a great deal in its sleep, the soul is thought to be fighting with the spirit.

Illness is caused, so it is believed, by the prolonged absence of the soul. A doctor will be called in to fetch back the exiled soul; or a man may try to recall it himself by pouring rum on the earth and invoking the god who may have taken the soul away, and pleading with him to set it free. A man who has a strong mind but a weak body, has a strong soul but a weak spirit.

The soul is not fully under the control of a man, and he does not always know the needs of his soul. Even with this soul, which is less ethereal than the spirit, there seems to be independence of the body, and sickness is thought to come from the soul to the body, and not *vice versa*. The soul "knows more than the man himself knows", and "is wiser than the man himself".

A witch's soul travels about during sleep, and goes off to the witches' coven. But if her soul is prevented from returning to her body on waking, by cutting the cobweb along which she travels, she will die. It is generally said that the witch's soul feeds upon the spirit (*kla*) of the victim, though some say that

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 46, 289-290.

it feeds upon the soul. Similarly, a practitioner of black magic will evoke the soul of a living person into a bowl of water, and stick thorns or pins into it; whereupon the owner of the soul will fall ill of sharp pains.¹

The Agni (pronounced Anyi) of the lower Ivory Coast, who are also of Akan stock and originated from what is now the Gold Coast during the wars of Ashanti and Denkira, call the soul *eume* (or *wawe*). This is that part of man which continues after death, and may reappear as a ghost. This soul wanders about in dreams and, if it is ill-disposed, may attack others against whom it has a grievance, especially on dark nights. But on moonlight nights men are safe against such attacks, say the Agni, for then one is accompanied by one's shadow which is visible by moonlight as during the daytime, and which seems to act the role of protecting power.²

The Adjukru of the southern and lagoon regions of the Ivory Coast, with whom I have personal acquaintance and concerning whom I have obtained original information, like other neighbouring tribes have no exact translation for our word "soul", as distinct from the spirit, which they call *abɔ̃*. There is a word (*li*) which means "core", and which is sometimes used of the innermost being of man. But our connotation of soul is more akin to their notion of person or personality (*egɔ̃*, person or man; like the Bantu *muntu*). Thus, in speaking of a child who acts like an animal, the Adjukru say that "he is a placenta, and not a person", i.e. his soul is not developed.

After death the personality-soul stays in the house where it has hitherto lived, for three months, and is visible to clairvoyants; while the spirit goes off to the oceanic spaces. At night the person joins the gatherings of other souls in the cemetery. Witches cannot touch this personal soul, but the spirit is the portion of the human entity which they are believed to devour.

The Bete, a little to the north-west, call the soul *zuzuko* (perhaps related to the Twi *sunsum*). This soul may separate itself from the body during life, and finally depart altogether after death, when the body begins to putrefy; for four days the soul stays near the corpse, until the burial rites are accomplished, and then it goes to the village of the dead.

¹ *Religion and Medicine of the Gã People*, 1937, pp. 92-93, 116.

² L. Tauxier, *Religion, mœurs et coutumes des Agnis de la Côte d'Ivoire*, 1932, p. 123. P. Cheruy, *Les Agni*, 1916. G. Joseph, *Côte d'Ivoire*, 1944, pp. 95-96.

Inheritance of the goods of the deceased can only begin after the burial, because the soul is still present, and the surviving members of the family are afraid that it will be jealous and spiteful if it sees them take out the belongings that it formerly enjoyed. At the sharing out, the head of the family spits out water four times in front of the goods, saying: "Now you are dead, salute our deceased parents; let us live in peace and do not come to torment us."¹

I have found that the Dida of the lower central Ivory Coast forest, neighbours of the Bete, call the soul *ugo* or *zuzu*, like the Bete *zuzuko*. The same word is used of a human or an animal shadow, there being no refinement of distinction between the two shadows here, such as is found among some more advanced tribes.

In the central Ivory Coast, there is belief in a soul, different from the shadow, since the latter dies with the body, whereas the soul survives. The Kanga-Bonou, Gouro, Baoule and Mande believe that this soul (called *iremon*, *iredi*, *umye*, *sukoro*, respectively) survives death and reincarnates. It may be destroyed by witches, and in that eventuality could not reincarnate, says Tauxier. The spirit is not thus destroyed, this author assures us contrary to the opinions of other tribes, and it will pursue the murderer with vengeance. Different words are used to denote the breath, and also the liver, although when witches arrive at the liver and consume it entirely the victim dies.²

UPPER GOLD COAST, UPPER IVORY COAST, WEST SUDAN

In the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast, and some tribes in nearby French territory, there are common forms of designating the soul. *Sia*, or like words, appear to correspond to the Twi *sunsum*, and perhaps also to the *sasa*, a word which, as we shall see later, is used by the Akan for departed spirits of a rather troublesome nature (*sia* in Nankane and Dagare; *sie* in Loberu; *siga* or *sega* in Mole, i.e. Mossi; *sig* in Kusal). There are local variations, and the form used by some tribes to indicate the personality-soul may be used by others for the spirits of divinities and guardian spirits.

The *sia* leaves the body during sleep, it is believed here as elsewhere. Sometimes the soul will enter into a new grave, and

¹ E. Dunglas, *Coutumes et Moeurs des Bété*, 1939, pp. 70-71.

² L. Tauxier, *Nègres Gouro et Gagou*, 1924, pp. 221, 255.

it may stay there when the hole has been closed up, whereupon its owner will sicken and die. To prevent this some sextons pretend to chase the souls of the living out from newly-dug graves. They profess to be able to see these souls in the graves. Having spotted such a wandering soul, the sexton takes a piece of broken pot and puts tobacco and pepper on it and sets fire to them, then he places them in the grave so that the soul, which cannot stand such a pungent smell, will be driven out.

Women have bags where they keep their most precious possessions, such as beads, and these are shrines for their soul while living (according to Freud, a bag is a female symbol). A man's soul is thought to live in his leather bag, or in his grain store. The eldest daughter is not allowed to look into her mother's bag on any pretence, as long as the mother is living. But when the mother dies, the eldest daughter and the eldest son together will look into this bag. Similarly with the father, into whose grain-store these two eldest children will look ceremonially after the death of the parent. When a man dies his soul is thought to melt like oil, and to sink into the ground.¹ The Mossi think that the personality-soul resides in the nose, whereas the spirit has its abode in the head. There is some confusion with breath and existence, which are also associated with the nose.

The Kulango, of the north-eastern Ivory Coast, connect the different spiritual powers of man with various portions of the body. One soul, possibly a guardian spirit, dwells in the head. The breath resides in the nose and throat but, like the shadow which follows the body, it does not survive death. The personality-soul has its dwelling in the blood, and when sacrifices are offered to a god it is this soul which goes out with the blood to the divinity. When a man dies his soul returns into dust, but can also be reborn in a child of the tribe.²

The Bobo are said to believe in two or three souls (*boni*). Everybody has a *boni* and a *managa*. The *boni* is comparable to the spirit, quitting man and thus causing death, and is the object of the maleficence of witches. The *managa* is lower, like the personality-soul; animals also have this soul, which resides near their jawbone. This soul wanders about during sleep. One of the souls goes to the village of the dead (*Konlombeni*) at death, while the other remains near to its family, and may appear to them.³

¹ R. S. Rattray, *Tribes of the Ashanti Hinterland*, 1932, pp. 43-45, 291, 397.

² L. Tauxier, *Le Noir du Bondoukou*, 1921, p. 196.

³ J. Cremer, *Les Bobo*, iv, "Mentalité mystique", 1927, pp. 167-168, 177-180.

Most of the tribes of the western Sudan, from Sierra Leone and the Guineas, and including the Fulani, distinguish between a soul, or double-image, and a spirit or vital principle. Islam has influenced many of them, but there is diversity of opinion concerning the lot of the soul and spirit; some think that the soul goes to Paradise, others that it stays on earth till the resurrection.¹

The Bambara and Mande, of West Sudan and Guinea, believe in a soul and spirit. The soul may be destroyed by witches, says Tauxier, but there is a superior soul, breath, or spirit, which continues after the death of the lower soul. The soul is connected with the shadow, and hence has been called a "double", the shadow being regarded, as we have seen previously, as an emanation from the body. But the soul is not identical with the shadow, and it is often associated with varying emotions, such as anger and fear. It is this soul which is believed to leave the sleeping body at will, its adventures appearing in dreams. Dreams are real, being the actions of the soul in company with other souls. In waking life the soul accompanies the body, but the Bambara think that while the body is asleep it is subject to the soul, and it may suffer from the dream activities of the soul; if a man is awakened brusquely death may supervene, because the soul is absent from the body on waking.²

TOGO AND DAHOMEY

Among the Ewe peoples, the principal words for soul and spirit are *ye* and *se*. (The *ye* is also called *semédō*, and the *se* is used alone, or as *selindō* or *lindō*). There is considerable variety of usage among the different branches of these related clans, in Dahomey and Togo. I have found variations in my own enquiries in Porto Novo and Abomey, and in writers such as Herskovits and Maupoil. The Gũ-alada Bible translates soul as *lindō*, corresponding to the Togolese Ewe New Testament rendering of *lubo* or *lihœ*. It will be more simple for us here to follow the most common usage of *ye* for soul, and *se* (or *selindō*) for spirit.

Jakob Spieth, in his study of the religion of the southern Togolese, distinguished two souls: a Life Soul and a Death Soul. The latter is small and belongs to death; the former is

¹ Cf. H. Gaden, *Proverbes et Maximes Peuls et Toucouleurs*, 1931; H. Labouret, *Les Manding et leur Langue*, 1934.

² *La Religion Bambara*, pp. 15-24; C. Monteil, *Djénne, une Cité soudanaise*, 1932, p. 129.

large and belongs to life. The Life Soul leaves man immediately upon the advent of death; the Death Soul stays by the corpse till the funeral rites are accomplished, and then goes to the underworld to join its forefathers.¹

The Dahomeans say that the *yε* is a personal soul, or personality. It is often compared with the voice, since this differentiates one person from another. The voice has an individual quality: it is somewhat independent of the body, and so it is a symbol of the soul. When a man dies his voice leaves his body; when a child is born his voice marks his identity and gradually grows to distinguish him. The voice is the sign of life, and when it is lost death has come.

We have previously referred to the idea of a soul (*yε*) associated with the blood, and power, of men and things. There is also thought to be a soul operative in the popular system of divining by the Ifa oracle, and located temporarily in the powder which is spread out on the divining-board. Animals and things have also their soul, and some say that they have a spirit (*sε*), though not all would agree. The difference between these lesser souls and that of man is purely qualitative: they have less vital force than he has. The soul of inanimate objects is a simple shade, and has no personality.

The soul is called the longest, most profound shadow of the body, or rather an unknown quantity in the heart of the shadow and not identical with it. During the whole of life the shadow accompanies the body; when a man lies down the shadow is still there—it is not apparent in the darkness, but if a light is brought it is seen to be still present; so it is with the soul.

At death, the soul goes with the body into the grave, and it stays there until the moment when the gravedigger is about to place a jar or bottle into the tomb proper, which is horizontal so that the earth does not fall on the body; then he calls out to everybody to stand back, and at that moment the soul ascends to God. Some say that the soul goes to God immediately the breath leaves the body, giving him an account of its deeds, and then returning to the body until the burial. Others say that there are two souls: one is the shadow and is all black, it dies and goes down into the grave with the corpse (it is also called *wēsagū*); the other is a brighter soul and is immortal. Sometimes, at night, the two can be distinguished from one another. The immortal soul goes to God at death, while the visible shadow decomposes with the corpse, and will become dust and

¹ *Die Religion der Ewee in Süd-Togo*, 1911, pp. 226 ff.

earth, for on opening old graves one finds that there is no body or shadow there any more. These are some of the speculations of the more thoughtful.

It is a man's soul that is judged for his misdeeds, after death, for this is the man himself, the personality. This soul will become an ancestral spirit or be reincarnated. Hence the soul is of great importance to the Ewe, even though a man has also a spirit, and a guardian genius. When a man talks or acts or reflects, it is his soul which animates him.

Women have as many souls as men, and they are of similar quality; the Ewe, having patrilineal inheritance, do not seem so concerned as the Akan over the inheritance of soul and blood. The value attached to the souls of some people differs: the soul of a non-nubile girl is less important than that of an adult woman; her soul is still asleep, she has not yet found her husband. A proverb says, "You have not yet entered the dwelling of a spouse, your soul has not yet obtained its support." A married woman's soul has gained such support and awakens to life, "her soul is made of that of her husband", or participates in his soul-force. She comes under the tutelage of her husband's spirit, and of the guardian spirit whose favour he obtains through the Ifa oracle.¹

SOUTHERN NIGERIA

The Yoruba call the soul *ṣkǎn*, a word which is used both for the physical heart, and for the ethereal part of man. The same word is used for the phallus; thus there is a connexion of thought between the soul and powers such as the blood and the semen.

The Yoruba make a similar connexion of soul and shadow to that observed among the Ewe, without identification. The shadow (*oji* or *ojiji*) follows the body as symbol of the soul, but it dies with the body, whereas at death the soul ascends to God. The soul is distinguished from the spirit (*iwīn*, ghost or divine spirit, and *emi*, breath, spirit).

The soul is the personal part of man, his own animating power, his consciousness or mind. If a man is lost in thought, it is said that "his soul has gone". So the soul wanders in sleep, and is immortal.²

The Ibo, of the lower Niger, show considerable varieties of

¹ Maupoil, *La Géomancie*, pp. 381-398; Herskovits, *Dahomey*, pp. 232-236.

² Cf. S. S. Farrow, *Faith, Fancies and Fetich, or Yoruba Paganism*, 1926, pp. 130-137. But I do not agree with all of Dr. Farrow's conclusions.

opinion as to the constitution of the soul. There are sometimes said to be three spirits associated with men, and two with women. The shadow is commonly thought to represent the soul or ethereal body, and that it ceases at death. Others say that the shadow does not die, because a corpse has a shadow; even a felled tree has a shadow, and if it is burnt the shadow enters into the ashes even though it may be covered up.

The "ball-heart" (*nkpulu-obi*) is nearest to our conception of the soul. It may be used of the virtue or force which a man has who possesses a strong mind, or a man of courage and endurance. The spirit world as a whole is called *Maw*, but this word is also associated with men on earth. The soul is thought of as the residence of the spirit, and when the spirit departs at death, the soul loses its energizing power. Thus some conceive of the soul as a dwelling-place for the spirit, while others (at Enugu and Awka) identify or unite the two, and consider the soul and the spirit to become one after death. Others again regard the soul as an ethereal body.

The soul proper is believed to wander about in dreams, and it is generally held to be this part of the spiritual self which is eaten by witches or injured by black magic.¹

The Ibibio, and some of the semi-Bantu tribes of south-eastern Nigeria, have a number of distinctions of soul and spirit, although they have only one generic word for this spiritual faculty. *Ukponn* is shadow, ethereal body, soul, spirit, genius. Between the various incarnations the personality-soul resides in the country of the dead, but the genius or over-soul is distinct and lives in the house of God.

The soul is believed to be located in the belly, and to leave the body during sleep. It is thought to pass through the nose, and when one dies who has been suspected of witchcraft the nostrils are stopped up, so as to prevent the return of the soul.

The shadow is associated with the soul, as an emanation, and affected by anything that happens to the soul; yet some believe that no serious harm can come through the shadow. But in dances care is often taken not to tread upon the shadows of others, and the performers stand far apart. The soul is also connected with animals, and it may be justifiable here to speak of a "bush-soul" (*ukpon-ikot*), to which we shall refer later.

The Yache have only one word (*urung*) for shadow, soul, and departed spirit. The Ekoi sub-tribes sometimes think the shadow represents the soul and give it the same name, while

¹ G. T. Basden, *Niger Ibos*, 1938, pp. 281-285.

others consider it to be a mere symbol which dissolves on the death of the body. Some think of the soul as living inside the body, a small thing in a man's breast which, on being set free by death, swells up to reach the size of the original body.¹

The Tiv of eastern Nigeria, says R. C. Abraham, may have absorbed Muslim or Christian ideas, though this latter is questionable. Their ideas of the soul are not easy to come by, in their original form. The whole notion of the soul is hazy; they use a word (*jijingo*) which may be connected with a well-known Bantu word (*mzimu*) in the sense of "shadow". Some use this word for the soul today, but others restrict its usage to the visible shadow or to the reflection cast in water. Yet this only refers to the shadow of a living man or animal, there being another word for the shadow of a tree; but this same word "shadow" is used for the reflection of both animates and inanimates in water. There is certainly belief in the subsistence of the soul after death, and in reincarnation, even if the ideas of the beyond are vague.²

NORTHERN NIGERIA

The Jukun think of the soul as a spiritual individuality (*adi* is the body; *adidi* or *dindî* the soul). The soul accompanies the body into the world at birth, and continues to exist after the death of the body. Figures of the dead, rounded stones and corn rubbers, are put in tombs in similar fashion to that in which the Egyptians placed figures of the dead in tombs so that they might enter into them.

The soul is composed, say the Jukun, of the "soul of birth" (*dindî mba*), which can be reincarnated into the world, and the unreincarnated soul (*dindî kpankî*) which remains in the after-world. The soul wanders about during sleep, revisiting places the dreamer had been to during the day, and re-enacting the day's events. One who awakes quickly has his soul close by when he wakens, but one who wakens slowly has his soul absent. The soul is closely linked with clothes, utensils, hair and nails, and by obtaining these objects a witch is able with his own soul to capture the soul of another person.³

Dr. Wilson-Haffenden describes the psychological beliefs of the Kwotto tribe, by distinguishing what he terms the "matter"

¹ P. A. Talbot, *Life in Southern Nigeria*, pp. 88, 119; *Peoples of Southern Nigeria*, vol. ii, pp. 262-263.

² *The Tiv People*, 2nd edn., 1940, p. 23.

³ *A Sudanese Kingdom*, pp. 202 ff.

or "maternal" soul (*kofi*), from a "pattern" or "paternal" soul (*ekiti*). It is the maternal *kofi* which seems to correspond most nearly to the thought of other peoples about a personality-soul. It comes from a man's mother, and is connected with the material body and especially with the blood. Thus it is comparable with the *abusua* of the Akan, the maternal and blood-soul. It will be remembered, also, that we have referred to the Hausa conception of *kofi* as a force or vital power in man which he constantly seeks to reinforce.

The Kwotto think that the maternal soul is responsible for producing the matter of the body, and it is "a sort of amorphous spiritual force or influence". On the death of the body the maternal soul returns to its original home, in association with the earth which is the source of the fertility of nature. The maternal soul being connected with the blood, this may be the reason why in many rites the female body is stained red, both at wedding ceremonies and at burial, among the Kwotto and the neighbouring Gbari and Malambu, and even the Muslim Fulani. The red colour makes a connexion between the blood-soul and the red earth. There are also fertility rites, wherein a genius of the tribe appears smeared all over with red clay.

Since a man receives his material substance from his mother, he is one with her in this way. But in appearance he may be like his paternal ancestors, since it is from his father that he inherits his totem, like the male *ntoro* of the Akan. Both maternal and paternal elements play their part in determining the laws of incest.¹

Islamic peoples, such as the Nupe, distinguish between soul and spirit. The "life-soul" (*ráyí*) appears to approximate to the spirit, whereas the other soul is the "shadow" (*fifingi*) which is like an image of the body. This soul normally stays by the body and spirit, but it wanders in sleep. If you dream of a living man, that means that his "shadow-soul" left his body in sleep and came to you so that your sleeping spirit could see it. A witch sends out her shadow-soul, causing nightmares to others, and eating their spirits.²

Of other tribes of northern Nigeria, the Katab associate breath and shadow with the soul. If a man becomes ill, it is thought to be due to the temporary absence of his soul from the body. The soul leaves the body during sleep, and is the cause of dreams. The soul may be somewhat dissociated during the

¹ *The Red Men of Nigeria*, 1930, pp. 150-151, 291.

² S. F. Nadel, in *Africa*, 1935, vol. viii, p. 428.

daytime, following its owner about; a man will sometimes turn round suddenly on the road imagining that there is someone behind him, and this feeling would be due to the soul.

The Gabin, of Adamawa province, have a pot made as an abode for their soul. A young man, on setting up house for himself, asks a friend to fashion a pot for his soul. He lies on the ground, while the potter moulds a crude likeness of the subject in clay. Ears, eyes, nose, mouth, shoulders and arms are modelled by excrescences, but no legs. The body of the pot makes the heart, or life. After firing the pot, its owner hides it in the bush, often in a cave. If he ever feels ill, he goes to this secret pot symbol, anoints it with oil, then puts some of the oil on his own temple, shoulders, and abdomen. They say that this makes his "soul" or "heart" regain its strength. These pots are clearly regarded as soul-counterparts, and to injure the pot brings sickness or death to its owner.

Neighbouring tribes have some similar ideas. The Hona do not regularly make soul-pots, as repositories or counterparts. But they have a comparable idea when a man, who has sought the protection of a powerful spirit, becomes ill and considers that his sickness is caused by too much dynamism coming from the protecting spirit. He will have a pot made to which to transfer this spirit who, in its own shrine, dwells in a like pot.¹

It will be seen how different are these ideas from those of the more advanced coastal tribes to the west. We cannot say, at this stage, how precise are the beliefs of these certainly more primitive northern peoples as to the nature of the soul, and whether it is not rather to them more of a vague "soul-stuff". It may be positively stated, however, that the larger coastal groups and developed societies do believe in an entity that may be fairly termed a personality-soul. This is a spiritual part of man, and is close to his body and thought during life. Other spiritual entities and influences connected with man will be considered in the following chapters.

¹ C. K. Meek, *Tribal Studies in Northern Nigeria*, 1931, vol. ii, pp. 62, 375 ff.

CHAPTER 5

THE SPIRIT

JUST as the word "soul" is used in different ways in English, to describe the spiritual part of man or even at times the soul of a deceased person, so we find varying usages of the word "spirit". The spirit may be "the animating principle in man (and animals)", "the soul of a person, as commended to God", or "a supernatural, incorporeal, rational being or personality, usually regarded as imperceptible at ordinary times to human senses". We speak of "the poor in spirit", of being "vexed in spirit", of "choice spirits", of the "spirit of the age", when we mean the human spirit and not the spirits of the departed, the spirit of God, or a movement of the air. It is necessary to restrict definition to man, if confusion is to be avoided.¹

The *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* declares that "the distinction of embodied soul and disembodied is no easy one. Even in speculative philosophies there is usually involved change of quality with the change of state—a distinction preserved, in general, by the differing connotations of the English words 'soul' and 'spirit'. There are, in fact, three groups of conceptions of the soul, differing in relation to the body. The embodied soul—variously imaged—forms the key to the first group, the disembodied soul, or spirit, to the second, while intermediate between these is the twofold group, comprising the idols, or doubles, of living bodies, and the ghosts, or hauntings, of dead ones. All three are common to the most primitive stages of human thinking—among living races of men, at least."²

In the thought of many West African peoples, there is believed to exist in connexion with man, not only what we have called a personality-soul, but also what may be termed a divine soul, or spirit. This is not the spirit of a departed person, a disembodied spirit of a dead man. It is one of those three or four "souls" claimed for the West African, but it seems to be partly human, partly divine, associated with and yet independent of the mortal body. If we may be allowed to call it "spirit", that is to be understood in a less closely personal sense than the part of man described as "soul". On the other hand,

¹ *New English Dictionary*, vol. ix, pp. 617-620.

² *E.R.E.*, vol. xi, pp. 725-726.

this spirit is more a "part" of man than is the tutelary genius or over-soul, to which the next chapter will be devoted. This usage of spirit may not be perfect, but it will permit us to give descriptions, without the distraction of too many vernacular words.

LOWER GOLD COAST AND IVORY COAST

The Akan personality-soul is the *sunsum*, the divine soul or spirit is the '*kra* (or *okara*). The former is more outward than the latter. J. G. Christaller in his dictionary defines this latter word: "Okra: The Soul of a man. According to the notions of the natives the *kara* of a person exists before his birth and may be the soul or spirit of a relation or other person already dead. In life the '*kra* is considered partly as the soul or spirit of a person (cf. *sunsum*, *honhom*), partly as a separate being, distinct from the person, who protects him . . . gives him good or bad advice, causes his undertakings to prosper, or slights or neglects him . . . and therefore, in the case of prosperity receives thanks and thankofferings like a fetish. . . . When the person is about to die, the *kara* leaves him gradually, before he breathes his last."¹

The '*kra* comes from the divine world, and has no share in evil which may be committed by the soul (*sunsum*) but, like a supreme intelligence, it awaits the preparation of a fit habitation so that it may come into and work through human destiny. The word *nkra* (*nkara*) means intelligence or message, and refers to the intelligence which the soul receives from God before descending into this world in another incarnation. Since only human beings receive instructions from God before birth, and are the only ones possessed of this divine intelligence, so the Akan never speak of the spirit ('*kra*) of an animal. Animals and plants have personality or individuality (*sunsum*) but not spirit.

Each soul, thus receiving its intelligent spirit from God (*Onyankopon*), should seek to realize the destiny divinely ordained for it, until it fully mature and rise to the status of a divine spirit (*honhom*, see next chapter). Evil comes through the neglect of the spirit, through the ignorance of the soul, and its omission to make itself a true dwelling for the spirit.²

This interpretation is somewhat philosophical, although Dr. Danquah is helpful in clearing a way through the maze of terminology, when he is interpreting Akan thought, and not

¹ *Dictionary of the Asante and Fante Language*, pp. 254-255.

² *Akan Doctrine of God*, pp. 86, 125.

too obviously under the influence of European philosophy. We must turn to Rattray for investigation into the common associations of this belief in the spirit of man.

The spirit comes to a child at birth. It is said that there are seven spirits, or that they are of seven kinds, and are the gods of the seven days of the week; this seems to mean that a child receives its spirit according to the day that it is born. "The '*kra* is the stranger", says the Ashanti, "for it found the blood-soul [*mogya*] and the personal soul [*sunsum* or *ntoro*] already in possession of the infant, they having been in the child since conception took place."

When a man dies his spirit goes to the world beyond, and it may sometimes depart a short while before the actual death. The panting of a dying man is attributed to the panting of the spirit as it climbs the heights of the spirit world. Slaves or captives who, in the olden days, were killed to accompany kings and chiefs to the afterworld, were called *okra*, which appears to be the same word as spirit, and indicates the final destination of the spirit. The spirit is definitely separated from the clan at death; when the coffin is taken outside the hut, through a special "soul-door", the head of the family steps forward, with a branch in both his hands, and touches the coffin alternately with the branches saying, "I separate your spirit [*'kra*] from us". Sometimes the rite is varied, when an old man or old woman touches the head of the clan with the second branch saying, "I separate you from the spirit of this departed one". Food for the journey, called spirit's food, is placed by the corpse with the words, "Here is a fowl for your spirit". Gold dust and charcoal are placed in the loin-cloth of the corpse; this is "spirit's money", and is to buy the necessities of the world beyond. The charcoal should "blind the revengeful spirit [*sasa*] of the dead man".

The '*kra* spirit is variously explained by the old men. "It is that which makes you breathe." "It protects a man." "When you sleep it does not leave you as your *sunsum* may." There is loose usage, which sometimes makes the term synonymous with the personality-soul: "I have a lucky '*kra*", or "I have a lucky *sunsum*."

A child having received its spirit from the day it is born, that day is dedicated to worship of the spirit, "washing the '*kra*", and this clearly separates it from the personality-soul, for no one would speak of "washing his *sunsum*".¹

¹ *Religion and Art in Ashanti*, pp. 153-160, 318.

The Gã conception of the spirit is similar to that of the Ashanti. Everybody has a *kla*, even eggs have this, though not inanimate things. Here, as among the Akan, but not among most Ewe tribes, the child has a "day-name", called the *kla*-name, from the day of the week on which he was born. It is sometimes said that, "all people born on the same day have the same *kla*", but this is difficult to understand, unless it is regarded as a spirit protecting many people. No child may be punished severely on his *kla*-day, his weekly birthday. For this reproach or abuse might trouble his spirit, and bring on sickness and even death by sending the spirit away.

The spirit inherited by a child is that of an ancestor; Dr. Field makes this quite positive, and it determines the talents and temperament of the child. When a man is reincarnated, the part of his individuality which comes again into the world is his spirit. When he dies his spirit leaves him, and he becomes a departed spirit or ghost. The spirit-world seems to be constantly increasing in population, whereas the amount of spirit coming into circulation in the world seems to remain fixed, although some of it may be withdrawn at times. A shooting star or meteorite heading towards the north is thought to be the sign of the spirit of some dying person on its way to the world beyond; a star shooting towards the south is the arrival of the spirit of a new-born child. It brings with it the child's fate.

This spirit side of man is all-important and rules his life. Food is thought to please the spirit, being spiritually and not merely physically satisfying. A hungry man gets faint and tired because his spirit is starving or neglected. Food enlivens his spirit, and so cheers the whole man. If a man is ailing and spiritless, it is because his spirit is sulking. A doctor is called in and prescribes some food that the spirit will like, or forbids another dish on the ground that the spirit does not want it. A medium may be called in for more difficult cases and, on going into a trance, she is asked to find out what the spirit needs.

The word *kla* often seems to be akin to our idea of the conscience, and to have a similar connotation of human and divine as we ascribe to that mysterious faculty. The spirit is troubled by evil-doing, for which it is not responsible. If a man has a good spirit and does something to disgrace it, the spirit may sicken and die. But he may have a bad spirit which does not mind what he does, and so he flourishes in his sin.

Injury may come to the spirit through the body. Disease is thought of as a mysterious force that seizes or harms the spirit. We have seen that the soul (*susuma*) wanders away from the body during sleep, and returns on waking. But if the spirit departs then life ceases. The spirit remains to maintain breathing, with which it is closely connected. If both soul and spirit leave, even if only temporarily, then the man dies. Soul and spirit may fight together, as when a child struggles in its sleep.

Injury may come to the spirit through the most intimate name, so most of the Gã rarely use their *kla*-names. It is the spirit which is attacked by witches, who divide it up and devour it. The spirit, though invisible, is thought of as having arms, legs, and organs like those of the material body. The witches share out and eat the different members, of which the spiritual heart and liver are said to be the most tasty. When the whole spiritual body is eaten, the man dies. The spirit of an unborn child may be stolen, and then it is still-born.

People who live to a great age are reputed to have eaten the spirits of other people, to strengthen their own spirit; hence old age is suspect, which is why many old women are accused of witchcraft. Nobody seems to wonder how or why the spirit may be divided into pieces and eaten. It is one of those questions that are so obvious to the European, but which do not appear to trouble the African with his incongruous ideas.¹

The Adjukru, of the Ivory Coast, have a word which approximates to the spirit of man (*abɲ*). It may be a compound of preposition and pronoun, meaning "with-thee" (*ab-ɲ*). The spirit is believed to be that which stays by a man and guards him. The spirit leaves the man at death, and is then called "dead-spirit" or "weeping-spirit", because the spirit is said to cry like a nocturnal bird or a weeping child when it leaves the body. The same word is used of the shadow, regarded as the image of the spirit within man. A different word is used of the shadows of animals and trees, for they have not spirits of the same kind as man. The spirit is believed to be attacked by witches.

The Bete believe in a spirit (*kuho*), which is more ethereal than the personality-soul (*zuzuko*). The spirit guides a man during his life, and after death it may manifest itself, generally in an inoffensive way, the word being used to express what we should call a ghost.

¹ Field, *Religion and Medicine of the Gã People*, pp. 92-94, 115-116, 183.

The Gouro and Mande recognize the existence of a principle other than the soul. This spirit (*bei* or *nyama*) is thought to reside in a man's head during his life. A notable function of this spirit is its work of avenging the death of its owner and pursuing witches who have injured him. Some informers connect it with the ghost, though two quite different words are used to express the two conceptions. Sometimes dying people say that the spirit of one they have offended is beating them in their last agonies. Or a diviner will declare that some spirit has killed the man, and sacrifice will then be made to the spirit to stop it killing other members of the family. There is evidently a connexion with the common word for divine and spiritual powers: *nyam* or *nyama*, a word which has a numinous meaning.¹

UPPER GOLD COAST, UPPER IVORY COAST, SUDAN

In the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast, the Isala make mud shrines for their spirits, and sacrifice to them as the Akan "wash" their spirit. The mud shrine, in size and appearance much resembling a mud pie, is made for the spirit (*dema*) or soul, and sacrifices are made upon this shrine. It is kept in the owner's room until his death, when, after a year's interval, the shrine is removed by his relatives and put outside the hut with the shrines of other ancestors. Women also may have similar shrines, if the diviner advises them to do so; but on a woman's death her shrine does not go with those of the ancestral spirits, but it is thrown away so that her spirit may share in the offerings made to her husband's spirit which she follows. The Isala believe that a person's spirit can enter into a newly born infant, even when the "owner" of the spirit is still alive. When a man is preparing to leave his home, he takes the small stone which is inside his spirit shrine and carries it off with him. Other nearby tribes, such as the Fera, have similar beliefs and practices.²

The Mossi and Fulse, of the upper Gold Coast and Ivory Coast, distinguish the spirit (*kimba*) from the personality-soul (*siga*). They differentiate it from the breath, which is closely akin to the existence (*nio*), for both leave by the nose when the man dies. The shadow does not seem to be associated with the spiritual powers.

The *kimba* means, first of all, ancestor; but it is at the same time part of the spiritual constitution of man, and dwells in

¹ *Nègres Gouro et Gagou*, pp. 221, 255.

² *Tribes of the Ashanti Hinterland*, pp. 481, 528.

his head during life on earth. When a man dies, the breath, soul and spirit all leave by the nose, which is the bodily seat of the personality-soul, though the spirit resided in the head like a conscience. The personality-soul stays near the terrestrial house, but the spirit goes to the village of the ancestors (*kimkulugo*, where spirits go).¹

The Bambara believe in a soul (*dya*, or *ni*; the latter indicating a vital force, and the former being more like a double of the human person, or a spiritual twin, and itself furnished with a *ni*). They speak also of a *wanzo*, a force which is difficult to define, but which leaves adolescents at the rite of circumcision or excision. Finally, there is the *tere*, which has been called both genius and individual character.

The *tere* lives in the head, and grows in the foetus during pregnancy. It is composed both of the spirit of its parents and also of that of an ancestor, whose soul and force it has inherited.

This word *tere* is used also in phrases descriptive of fortune, good luck, or evil genius; it may be applied to animals or places, in the sense of an animal whose possession brings good fortune, or a house whose site is propitious.

After the birth of a child, the character of this spirit is sought for by the old people, in a ceremony that takes place on the eighth day. Many characteristics of the body are examined, to discover the type of spirit of the child: the way the hair grows, the joining of the eyebrows, the shape of eyes, mouth, hands and feet. A large head is the sign of a chief; a slight baldness indicates a rich man. As the child grows, his physical habits are taken as signs of his character: grinding teeth, claspings hands, kicking up dust. When a girl marries many of these actions are carefully examined, and judged to be indications of either prudent or careless spirit.

When the man dies his *tere* becomes the *nyama*. This is a force often spoken of like a universal energy, but associated with man as a distinct entity. The human *nyama* is a force which seeks out the one responsible for his death, haunting the murderer. Similarly animals have a *nyama*, often called "spirit of vengeance", and which hunters are careful to placate. But when duly propitiated the *nyama* may be asked to bless and help his family.²

¹ L. Tauxier, *Le Noir du Yatenga*, 1917, p. 384.

² D. Traore, "Le *tere* chez les Bambara du Segou"; and G. Dieterlen, "Note sur le *tere* chez les Bambara"; in *Notes Africaines*, 1947, No. 33, pp. 29-31, No. 35, p. 28.

Many of the tribes of the western Sudan, even when Islamized, believe in a spirit as well as a soul. The Fulani call it *wōnki*, which is derived from the root "to be, to exist." It seems legitimate to translate this by principle of existence, or vital principle. It is not the breath, though it is associated with the latter, and sometimes so interpreted. This is indicated from expressions such as: to possess the vital principle, to be in life; to fight with the vital principle (seeking to flee), which means to rattle, in speaking of a dying person. It is this spirit which is believed to go to Paradise or Hell, while opinion is divided as to the lot of the shadow-soul. It is the latter that may be captured by witches, says M. Labouret, but this soul is so closely linked with the spirit that sickness and death come on speedily unless the evil is tackled at once.¹

TOGO AND DAHOMEY

In the Ewe vocabularies, a common term for the spirit is *sɛ*. But among the Gē (Mina, or Popo) the word *ekla* is used, and the Togolese Ewe often speak of the *aklama* or *kla*; evidently the Twi '*kra*' has spread eastwards along the coast via the Gā. The *kla* is sometimes loosely identified with the soul (*yɛ* or *lu'wɔ*), but the most common and ancient conception appears to be that of a spirit. Dr. Westermann connected the word *aklama* with the Efik *akana*, meaning a promise to return to the other world; but the Efik are remote from the Ewe, even though there are traditions of migrations from a common home.

The spirit (*sɛ*) is possessed by every mortal, together with his other spiritual attributes. It is invisible, and cannot know death. It is immutable, and it does not follow the corpse to the grave as does the personality-soul, but it returns at once to God (*Mawu*). If the personality-soul with which the spirit has been associated is condemned by God to annihilation on account of evil-doing, the spirit will not be destroyed also, but God will give it another being to indwell.

Hence, like the Akan '*kra*', the *sɛ* is like a protector or conscience, the moral sense of every being. The spirit counsels a man to right action, and opposes wrongdoing. It cannot suggest evil, and no misfortune can come to a man through his spirit. It is often translated as tutelary spirit. The spirit is sometimes called our second self, "second us", the guardian given by God, who turns away misfortune and death, and stays by us until our destined day of death.

¹ H. Labouret, in *Africa*, 1935, vol. viii, pp. 462-463.

Some say that all creatures have an immortal spirit, all that lives and breathes and has blood, and even bloodless insects.

The spirit is sent by God, and he is indeed the great spirit of all, the spirit of the universe. One of the Ewe titles for God is Great-father-spirit (*Dada-se-gbo*), another is God-spirit (*Mawu-se*); these are different from the titles of divinities which are *vudu* (or *vodũ*). The individual spirit of man is but a tiny particle of the great Spirit, into which it is reabsorbed at death. The human spirit is one principle with God. Sometimes people say, "my God", in the sense of "my spirit". Everyone has an individual spirit, derived from God, and found in all beings.

The older men are not always clear on the distinction of soul and spirit. Some say that the spirit represents the inner voice, that gives us advice, and determines actions. It is found in all man's faculties, including the sperm. After death the spirit will not suffer for the man's ill deeds, as will his personal soul.

Another term used for the spirit is *lĩndõ* or *se-lĩndõ*. Although this word is translated in the Gũ-alada Bible for the human soul, yet I am of the opinion that Herskovits is right in regarding it as "the God who lives in every person's body, the bit of Mawu in every human being". It follows that the Biblical translation for the personality-soul would have been better rendered by *ye*, the part of the personality which is held accountable for human actions. Admittedly the whole conception of the soul is complex, and it does not fit too closely to European or Biblical psychology, but we must use the nearest terms that are available, and avoid those that may be definitely misleading.

This spirit (*selĩndõ*) is akin to intuition or conscience, and appears to be but a variation on the more common word *se*. This is the inward voice which inspires good deeds and warns against wrong, which originates thought in the mind, which gives intuitions of danger threatening, which restrains words in a delicate debate. The spirit bears witness to God if the soul has tried to hide or falsify its account in the judgment. If God is very angry with a man he may recall the spirit of the person, who then dies prematurely before his fixed term of life has run out.

The spirit returns to God before the final breath of the body, at the beginning of the agony. This is not the true death, and preparation for burial only begins after the heart stops beating

and the body stiffens. So the spirit goes in front of death, and is the condition by which death is allowed to come upon man at its departure. The spirit is the life or preservation. God sends the soul back to earth, but not the spirit, for if he did both he would recreate the same person.

As the spirit is a part of God, so by sending it into men and women God keeps some control over their actions. Some say that animals participate in the life of God, and thus obtain their vitality, but yet have no proper spirit. Yet others maintain that animals and things must have a spirit which makes them grow, and gives them character. As trees grow from nuts, and smoke has a central fire, so the spirit gives life to every being and thing.

The location of the spirit is also debated. Some situate it in the pelvis, from whence come children. I have heard it said that the spirit dwells in the blood, and that it is related to the word for the liver. Others place the spirit in "six lines" which are supposed to be visible on the forehead. Another placed the spirit in the entire head, giving as reason the sacrifice which is made to the head, either for the indwelling intelligence or for God of whom it is a part.

A woman is called the spirit-wife (*se-si*) of the man who had her as a virgin. As all that happens to a man is the doing of his spirit, when he marries that is the responsibility of his spirit who therefore has care of his wife.¹

SOUTHERN NIGERIA

The Yoruba call the soul *shān*, connected with the heart, as we have seen. The spirit is called *emi* (from a word *mi*, to breathe; *mi ami dake* is to take the last breath). The spirit is associated with life and breath, but it is not these things. It departs at death, leaving the body which it had inspired. The word is used also of the divine spirit (*emi mimo*, Holy Spirit), but not of the divinities (*orisha*).

There is another word (*iwin*) which may be used of the human spirit, though more often for the ghost of a departed person and, in some areas, for a god spirit (e.g. central Dahomey). There is a clear distinction between the personality-soul and the directing spirit: the latter is more closely in touch with God (*olorūn*), both in earthly life and after death.

The Ibo speak of *maw* with general reference to the spirit-world, and the activities of its members. *Maw* is also connected

¹ *Dahomey*, ii, pp. 232-235; *La Géomancie*, pp. 381-388.

with living people; it is the spirit which takes up its residence in the soul (*nkpulu-obi*). When some extraordinary event happens to a man, to take away his breath as we say, the Ibo say "my spirit flew away". When death occurs, the spirit is thought to go out of the body and the soul is thus deprived of all life-giving force. When the spirit departs the soul, which was its dwelling-place, is deserted, and so it loses all its might.¹

It has not been possible to obtain information as to the beliefs of other southern Nigerian tribes in the spirit, and there remains a great deal of research to be done in many places.

NORTHERN NIGERIA

The Jukun believe in the soul (*dindi*) as distinct from the *bwi*, the latter being like a "personified dynamism" of a living being. This power or spirit continues after death with similar force to that which it possessed during earthly existence. The same word (*bwi*) is used of a pursuing ghost which has power to haunt those still living on the earth.²

We have heard that the Kwotto believe in a "pattern" or paternal soul (*ekiti*), as distinct from the "matter" or maternal soul. The paternal spirit comes to a man from his father, or rather from the paternal ancestors of his father. This spirit is the "pattern" from which a child is shaped in its mother's womb, and it has itself a shape like that of a material body. While the physical body is inherited from the mother, yet the resemblance of the child is thought to come from the father's side. The child inherits its totem through the father, and both male and female elements join in determining the marriage laws. When a man dies it is believed that his paternal soul returns to the sky, where it is associated with water and rain, the male fertilizing element of nature.³

The Islamized Nupe similarly believe in two souls or spirits for every human being. The "life-soul" (*ràyi*, perhaps connected with the Arabic *ruh*, and the Hebrew *ruach*) is the same word as that which is used for life in general. It is this life-soul or spirit which gives the power of life, and which enables a man to see and hear the outer world. A curious difference from other tribes is seen in the thought that, so we are told, it is the life-soul which dreams, but that the people it sees in dreams are the shadow-souls (*fìfingi*) of others who have left their bodies to come to the sleeper. Witches are held to send out

¹ *Niger Ibos*, p. 281.

² *A Sudanese Kingdom*, p. 204.

³ *Red Men of Nigeria*, pp. 150-151.

their "shadow-souls" to eat the "life-souls" of their victims, just as Akan and Ewe believe that the witch sends out her soul to feed on the spirit of a victim.¹

With local variations, most West African tribes distinguish the personality-soul from the spirit. Some writers have compared this conception of the spirit with the Egyptian *khu* or spiritual soul, which could not die under any circumstances, dwelling in the spiritual body (*sahu*).²

¹ S. F. Nadel, *loc. cit.*

² E. A. W. Budge, *The Book of the Dead*, lix-lxiv.

CHAPTER 6

GUARDIAN GENIUS, OR OVER-SOUL

IN addition to the personality-soul and the spirit already considered, there is a further spiritual entity often associated with human beings. The complexity of the spiritual nature of man, as conceived in West African psychology, may now be realized, and the difficulty of drawing clear lines of demarcation. Different tribes have distinguishing emphases in their psychological outlook, as in their religious practices. While there may be some apparent overlapping between the categories of "souls", yet in many areas the broad outline of belief may be sketched.

The spiritual entity to which we now turn our attention is a transcendental self or super-ego, which has sometimes been termed the over-soul. In some ways it is comparable to the Roman genius. Through the variety of detail, the underlying notion seems to be that of a portion of divinity, which watches over men and sends down influences upon them. This guardian genius rules destiny, and receives offerings from men.

Without suggesting direct derivation, or even exact parallelism, the West African belief may at least be compared with the ancient Egyptian belief about the *Ka*. According to Breasted, this was a "kind of superior genius intended to guide the fortunes of the individual".¹ Flinders Petrie said that "it seems, then, best to regard the *Ka* as an ancestral emanation, which was associated with each man from birth, and by its superiority would guide and help him through this life and the next. . . . A man on dying 'went to his *Ka*'. . . . The *Ka* is superior to the living person. It was appealed to for protection. . . . In the future world a person is under the dominion of his own *Ka*. . . . The dead person 'lives with the *Ka*, who expels the evil that is before him, and removes the evil that is behind him.'"²

It will be remembered that Plato appears to have thought of a part of the soul acting as a guardian spirit. "As concerning the sovereign part of the soul within us, that which we say and say truly, dwells at the top of the body and raises us from earth towards our heavenly kindred, forasmuch as we are a heavenly and not an earthly plant, we ought to believe that God has given it to each of us as a daemon."³

¹ *Development of Religion and Thought in Ancient Egypt*, 1912, p. 52.

² *Ancient Egypt*, 1914, p. 24.

³ *Timaeus*, 90, A.

LOWER GOLD COAST AND IVORY COAST

In the Twi language there is a word *honhom*, used to denote the highest form of spirit; not the soul but allied to the soul, and also to God. It may be derived from *ehon*, marrow, pith, brain, essence; the repetition *hon-hom* would serve to reinforce the idea, the essence of essence, the most inward spiritual force.

From God every soul receives its spirit, to which is given a destiny to be fulfilled, in the realization of which it becomes one with the supreme essence or guardian genius *honhom*. God is the heart of reality, sending out an all-pervading force which returns to him again.¹

We have already referred to another Twi word, which is used for a physical element, *ntoro*, indicating the semen and the male power which with the blood goes to form a man. The Ashanti think that the *ntoro* semen-spirit element is transmitted to a child by its father, and cannot pass through the female, although the necessity of co-operation of both male and female partners is not doubted.

Again this word *ntoro* is used of the exogamous divisions, to one of which every Ashanti belongs. Both the male and female elements are exogamous, though by cross-cousin marriages the best of both elements is believed to be inherited by a child. The *ntoro* designates a spiritual force, a totemic spirit, which comes upon a child, and is associated with his spiritual powers.

Being active in conception, the totemic spirit is thought to be present at the earliest stage of a child's life. Sometimes the totemic spirit is called by the same name as the soul or spirit (*sunsum* and *'kra*), but this is loose usage. It is stated that at death the totemic spirit does not go with the human spirit to the ancestral world, but it is separated from it and goes to join the group spirit (*obosom*, god), and then is reincarnated once more through any man of the same totemic (*ntoro*) group, and independently of the blood-soil with which it was associated in a previous existence. The totemic spirit goes to a man's children or, failing them, to his brother's children, its function being to care for those belonging to a similar totemic spirit. A woman cannot pass on her totemic spirit to her own offspring, for they have received theirs from their father, but in this case the spirit will not look after the woman's children, but after her own brothers and sisters and any others on that side.

¹ *Akan Doctrine of God*, pp. 152, 170-171.

If a man and a woman of different clans marry and have a child, the child's clan or blood is the same as that of its mother, while its totemic spirit is the same as its father's. The child's name is held to depend on the totemic spirit, and will be chosen from one of the father's ancestors.

To find out to which totem a man belongs one asks, "What *ntoro* do you wash?" This washing of the *ntoro* is a rite that is observed on the day of the week which is sacred to the totemic spirit. The king of Ashanti used to "wash" in his palace every Tuesday, while the people and chiefs went to the river; the lower ranks entering the water to bathe, while the greater ones had water brought to them on the banks in brass pans. Water was taken in a gold basin (soul's basin) back to the royal palace.

Ordinary men and women do not conduct this rite every week on the totem day, but when a man's god tells him to do so, or when it is thought helpful it is performed to conciliate the spirit. The rite takes place in the house without any priest or intermediary.¹

The Gã believe in a personified fate, not unlike that which Ewe and Yoruba derive from the Ifa oracle. This fate is personal and in close contact with the individual. It is not part of the human constitution, like the soul and spirit (*susuma, kla*), yet it is said that the spirit "carries the fate" (*gbeshi*). The fate or life-programme comes from the family god, and is individual to each member.

A man's fate is supposed to walk behind him, but it may get out of hand and walk in front and so lead its owner astray. For such a mishap a priest is consulted, and he will make the man humble himself so that the pride of the fate is touched, and it will amend its ways. The fate is thus personified, yet it is not sufficiently important to receive thanks or offerings, such as those which a man makes to his wife's god, her soul and her spirit, when she gives him a child. Requests are not made direct to the fate, but when the fate has brought a man fortune he will give it an annual thanksgiving of yams.

Bad fate is thought to be a special cause of sterility and miscarriage, and of the troubles of adolescence. When one is thought to be influenced by a bad fate and commits crimes, especially kleptomania, it is said that he cannot help stealing, for his fate does this wrong so as to get the man into trouble. The offender is treated more like a sick man than a criminal.

¹ *Ashanti*, pp. 45-53; *Religion and Art*, pp. 318-319.

This may be sound psychology; it reminds one of Erewhon, where crime was a disease and physical sickness a criminal offence.

If the fate is very bad, it must be cast out. This is done by putting a heavy weight on the patient's head, while gongs are beaten near his ears; when he is deafened or hypnotized with this horrible noise the fate "gets up" and is hooted away and forbidden to return.¹

UPPER GOLD COAST AND IVORY COAST

Belief in guardian spirits, often ancestral, is common throughout the Northern Territories. Among the Nankanse there is belief in a guardian spirit (*segere*) which takes charge of a man as its "ward" (*sege*, the verb, means to put someone in the charge of another). A spirit may express its desire to adopt a child, or several children, and this concern is made known through the diviner. The adoption may take place while the child is still in its mother's womb, or at any time during childhood and even later, though it is usually early in the child's life that the adoption takes place.

These guardian spirits may belong to any of the different classes of spiritual beings composing the Nankanse pantheon: human spirits, spirits of persons who have been killed, spirits of some tribal divinity. Normally these guardians are drawn from the child's ancestors on either the father's or mother's side, but not the child's own father or mother.

When a child is born, the head of the family goes with an offering to the shrine of the spirit that has been indicated to him as the child's guardian. Later on the baby is taken to the shrine of the spirit which had possessed it in the womb. Water is given to the shrine, and the child drinks some of it. If a guardian spirit does not care properly for its ward, through the advent of sickness or weakness, then some other guardian spirit is sought for, but it must be stronger than the other, to prevent the neglected one harming his erstwhile charge in spite.

While it may seem that this guardian spirit is an external and separate being from the ward that it has adopted, and therefore hardly to be considered in the category of "soul", yet the relationship is very close because the spirit is usually an ancestor bound by blood-ties to the child. The ward will be given the name of the ancestor who, it is believed, has

¹ *Religion and Medicine of the Gã People*, pp. 94-97.

expressed the wish to become the child's guardian spirit, and when the name is given the child's parents say, "Today grandfather has come back home". Hence there is a degree of reincarnation of the ancestor in the child, and this belief is common to many of these guardian spirits.

Similar beliefs are found among other northern tribes: Dagaba, Lobi, Isala, Kusase.¹ The Tallensi believe that an ancestral spirit can become a man's spirit-guardian, and this spirit is called "he who has my life in his keeping, so that I exist". The ward must keep the totemic observances and tabus which the spirit-guardian observed during its own life on earth, for he will have to give sacrifices to this guardian all his life and so should keep its tabus. The Tallensi believe in a "personal Destiny" (*yin*), derived from significant events that happen during life, such as illness and birth of children. Particular ancestors become his destiny, and he makes a shrine which contains symbols of the events when they showed him their favour. Animals are prominent among these symbols, and the fortune of the chase is attributed to the aid of the Yin ancestors in the life of the hunter.²

TOGO AND DAHOMEY

Many tribes have a belief in what are termed "spiritual husbands" and "spiritual wives". These are probably ancestral and connected with the human souls, one of which is thought to live contemporaneously in the spiritual world. Before coming to earth this spirit has lived with God, and may need to be brought into direct relation with the earth.

In central Togo, a woman who seeks to have a child goes to a priest who calls on the woman's spiritual husband, addressing it as "on top of God-husband". If it is a man who seeks a child, the priest calls on the spiritual wife, with the title of "on top of God-woman". The spirit of the husband or wife is informed of what is needed, and is besought to answer the request. A fowl is killed, the manner in which it falls being held indicative of the good or evil disposition of the invoked spirit; it is cooked with spices and then some is poured on the ground for the spirit-husband, and the rest is eaten by the suppliant, being thus a communion sacrifice.³

The Fõn-Ewe believe in a spiritual guardian, one of the souls

¹ *Tribes of the Ashanti Hinterland*, pp. 162, 293-294, 419.

² *Dynamics of Clanship*, pp. 131-133, 144.

³ A. W. Cardinall, *Tales told in Togoland*, 1931, pp. 61-64.

of man, who is a reincarnated ancestor. A deceased person can be reborn in a new-born child in his own family or in another; this is called the *joto* of the child. The fact of this reincarnation, and the name of the defunct ancestor now reappearing, is declared by consultation of the Ifa (Fa) oracle. As soon as the child is born, the diviner is asked who has sent the child into this world, who it is that he resembles, for every new life is like an old one. A child's guardian (*joto*) and his soul (*ye*) are already old in him. Only the diviner declares the reincarnation, but there is often a resemblance so that the parents suspect which ancestor it is. The declared ancestor becomes the guardian of the child, the baby receives his grandparent's name, and henceforward offerings made for the guardian of this child will go to this ancestor.

This guardian is declared to be a soul, indeed the senior soul of the child. The ancestor who desired the perpetuation of his name is believed, together with God, to have prepared the earth from which the child's body is formed, and then becomes the spirit-father of the man. When a man is about to die, the guardian ancestor may plead for him to be spared for a time, although it is recognized that death is finally ineluctable.

The relationship between soul, spirit, and guardian genius is not easy to define, as also the problem of the ancestral spirit incarnate in a child and yet receiving sacrifices. Either the problems have not been faced in the spirit of European logic, or else, as so often happens, the ultimate questions are neglected today more than in the past, and those who might have been capable of thinking out independent solutions are spending their energies in pursuit of material riches.

There is a proverb which says, "the hand which is laid on my head is my invisible guardian". The hand is a symbol of the spirit, and the guardian indwells the head. The name of spirit (*se*) is often used to denote whatever is spiritual and strange, and the proverb may mean that the guardian marks and guides my spirit.¹

A further spiritual power associated with the soul is the fate, or destiny, with which both Ewe and Yoruba concern themselves so much, and which is revealed in the Ifa oracle giving its full horoscope (Ewe *kpoli*, from Yoruba *po ori*, the soul which created the head). So important is the revelation of this fate held to be, that it is often called a fourth soul (compare the Gã *gbeshi*). Only men can claim this fate, but it is not

¹ *La Géomancie*, pp. 382-386; *Dahomey*, ii, 233-238.

individual to men only, for it is also concerned with his family, wives, children and dependents.

The Ifa oracle is regarded as a protecting destiny which watches over the symbols, calabash and nuts, which have revealed the fate of the man, and which are related to his very life. Sometimes the horoscope or fate is spoken of in terms very similar to those which are used of the spiritual guardian or reincarnated ancestor. If anything, the fate is regarded as more profound than the guardian ancestor, for it represents the deepest knowledge which a man is able to acquire about himself; beyond this is the unfathomable. The fate is the ultimate depth of personality, and it is said that "the fate is stronger than the guardian genius" (*joto*).

Although a woman has no personal fate of her own declared to her, except under very exceptional circumstances, yet she shares in her husband's ritual. She is his "spirit-wife". There is a ceremony of "washing" the soul, resembling the Ashanti washing of the *ntoro*. It is said equally, "I shall wash my spirit" (*se*), or "I shall wash my fate" (*Fa*). The wife takes part in this rite, receiving the divining nuts after her husband has sprinkled oil and blood on them, and washing them with water. She may lick them, if there is not blood on them, and thus receive a share in her husband's soul.

This communion in sacrifice forms a type of blood-pact, and binds the woman in fidelity to her husband; she must not trouble his soul, for a little of it now dwells within her, and would punish her for wrong-doing. At other times, when a husband is offering kola nuts to his fate, he divides them into two groups, one for each of his wives, who must all take their share. An unfaithful wife would stand self-confessed for not daring to take her share (paralleled in the deliberate abstention of unfaithful Christians from receiving Holy Communion). A woman who confesses her sin makes cleansing necessary. Her husband must purify his own soul, washing the palm-nuts with water and leaves and offering fowls. The wife must wash herself with water.

Fables concerning the guardian fate *Fa*, in the roles of tutelary genius, guardian of virtue, good guide, watchman, and succour, are to be found in R. Trautmann's work on this subject.¹

¹ *La Divination à la Côte des Esclaves et à Madagascar*, 1939, pp. 116-122. For particulars of the Ifa divining see my *West African Religion*, Ch. XIII, or B. Maupoil, *op. cit.*

SOUTHERN NIGERIA

The Yoruba original of this word for fate is variously denominated (*opori*, *ipōri*, *ipin*). This guardian fate protects a man who is dedicated to Ifa. It is held to have presided at the creation of the child, and to guide and shape a man's life. Sometimes used as an equivalent of the spirit (*emi*), it is the superior guardian genius, revealed to those who undertake the search for their own personal destiny.

The dictionary defines *ipōri* as "the big toe (worshipped by the Yorubas)", and Sir Richard Burton said that they "honour . . . their big toes". This misapprehension has arisen from the fact that in offerings made to the guardian spirit, blood and palm oil are daubed on the toe (a phallic symbol?).¹

Another form of the indwelling spirit is "the owner of the head" (*olori*), whose abode is in the head and seems to be a type of intelligence or conscience. This Ori has been compared with the idea of over-soul, more prominent among the Ibo. It is a guardian or genius which is possessed by adults; a household god, it was worshipped by both sexes and associated with human fate. Good or bad fortune is thought to depend upon this guardian, and offerings are made to obtain good luck. If misfortune comes it is said, "Your Ori has turned its back on you".

The Ori is represented by forty-one (a sacred number) cowries which are made into the shape of a crown, and hidden in a chest of similar form. The maker of this crown is given presents while he shapes it, to bring good luck. The chest is called "the house of Ori", and is as big as the owner can make it. After death the image and the chest are destroyed, like the symbols of the horoscope.

Offerings are made to this spirit which dwells in the head. The head is shaved and the suppliant dressed in white clothing. A white fowl is killed and some of the blood and feathers daubed on the head of the person. His friends come to eat the sacrifice, but the man himself will not take part in it, but watches the proceedings without speaking.

A similar ceremony is performed by the Fōn to propitiate the soul (*ye*).

Yet another spirit, or form of the same one, is said by some

¹ *Dictionary of the Yoruba Language*, Lagos, 1925. R. Burton, *A Mission to Gelele*, 1893 edn., ii, p. 98; Sir A. B. Ellis says the same in *Yoruba-speaking Peoples*. See also S. S. Farrow, *op. cit.*, pp. 130-131; S. Johnson, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

Yoruba to dwell in the stomach and to be "the sharer of food". Hunger is the sign of this spirit, and fire is its personification: for fire is necessary for cooking the food which sustains man and his spiritual faculties. It will be remembered that many tribes place the centre of thought in the heart, and the emotions in the stomach; like the Hebrew "bowels of compassion".

The Edo of Benin believe in a spiritual guardian or over-soul, called Ehinoha, dwelling in heaven and sending down its "son" (*ehi*) to live in man. When one of these sons dies another is born, in a person of the same sex. The Ijaw of Calabar district seem to have borrowed the idea of an over-soul from their neighbours the Ibo, among whom the belief is highly developed. A child receives a symbol of this guardian seven days after birth, and a doctor beseeches the protection of the genius, who has a name similar to, but is a lesser form or emanation of, the supreme goddess Tamuno, or Chi.¹

The Ibo have a prominent belief in a genius or over-soul, although the conception varies in the different clans, and there is no fully consistent theory. Some consider the genius or guardian (Chi, a title used also of the supreme God) somewhat in the light of a god-father or mother. The genius is indicated by a doctor after the birth of a child, and may be a living person of either sex, provided that he or she is of the same clan. The ward must help his guardian in every way, and bury him at death like his own father. Sacrifices are not made to this guardian during his earthly life, but after death he is thought to be more capable of helping his ward than ever before. All luck is believed to come from him. The same guardian may have several wards.

Among the Ibo of Owerri and Aba, the guardian Chi lives in heaven, and has only one ward (Chi-child, or child on earth). The genius is not to be confused with the supreme God, of the same name, but he is greater than his "under-soul" who comes to earth and is of the same sex. Some geniuses are good, but others are bad. The latter send ill-fortune, no matter how good the behaviour of the "son", for this is punishment for sins committed in a previous life and which had not been sufficiently paid for then (a moral concomitant of the belief in reincarnation). The genius is held responsible for the evil deeds of its son, as being stronger and more able to control him. After death a man may see his genius. Others (Bende) think that the genius does not incarnate but simply sends children, of

¹ *Peoples of Southern Nigeria*, ii, pp. 283-295.

the same sex. God and the genius together determine the time of birth and death.

Chi appears almost as a generic term for "god"; as genius it deputizes for the great God (Chi-Ukwu). Children often share their father's genius until old enough to get one for themselves (as other tribes obtain their horoscope at adolescence). Material symbols are made of the Chi. One is dedicated to the supreme God, and alone receives direct sacrifice. The image of the personal genius is a stick with a rounded end, but not a human image, and sometimes decorated with cowries. The personal genius is also represented at times by a tree in front of the house. It may be referred to as "my god", or "my genius" (*chim*). When an accident occurs, the person concerned will cry "alas, my god". In the morning the Ibo say, "light [Chi] has broken, and at night "light has finished". But they affirm that there is no identification between god and light, and hence no sun-worship.¹

The semi-Bantu tribes of the eastern Nigerian coastline believe in a "spirit" which dwells with God, but influences men on earth. The Ibibio say that this genius (Ukpon, a word also used of other souls of man) does not incarnate but is akin to the spirit of man. The soul and spirit compose the personality which subsists through life and death, and partly into reincarnation; while the genius is superior to these temporal accidents and lives on a higher plane.²

NORTHERN NIGERIA

The Jukun believe in a kind of personification of their soul, who dwells in the heavenly land of the dead, Kindo. This genius is usually called a mother, but may also be referred to as a brother-in-law or friend in Kindo. The genius visits men in sleep, and may wrestle with them; if the genius wins it is a sign of coming misfortune (we are reminded of Jacob at Peniel). Normally the genius acts as a man's protector, and on death a man is welcomed into Kindo by his spiritual counterpart. There is belief in spiritual wives and husbands, similar to that held by Ewe and other tribes. Moles on the skin are taken as signs of spiritual guardians.

The most important genius seems to be the "mother-in-Kindo", and it is only to her that certain rites are made (called *Abi* and *Aya*). On the birth of a child, the father at once tells

¹ *Niger Ibos*, pp. 46 ff., *Peoples of Southern Nigeria*, ii, pp. 284-295.

² *Peoples of Southern Nigeria*, ii, pp. 295-296.

his paternal relatives of the happy event, and they instruct him to set up a pot or a pillar of mud for the child. This symbol is placed at the door of the mother's hut and the child is told, "Here is your *Abî*, your second self, your *dindî*, your mother, and your wife [or husband]". Everyone makes regular offerings to the guardian mother, throughout the whole of life, and at death the symbol is broken and the potsherds put on the grave. The genius is held to escort a child into the world, and to call a man away at death. Sometimes it is unhappy through being separated from its child, and then a man feels dissatisfied with his food and gets no taste or benefit from it, because the genius has eaten the inner essence of the food. When a child dies young it is because he had wanted to see the world but, his curiosity satisfied, he had returned to his spiritual mother.

A similar belief may be traced even among Islamized tribes, such as the Hausa, in the veneration they pay to the afterbirth, which they regard as a symbol of the soul.¹

The Kentu, of the British Cameroons, have a cult (*Gura*) which parallels in many respects the Jukun cult of the spiritual mother (*Aya*). The Kentu also think of this genius as the spiritual mother of a man, or the spiritual father of a woman. Everybody has in the house a pot which is the symbol of the spiritual parent, and to this he makes libations when he feels the necessity of so doing. If he becomes ill, a relative will go to this pot and, with due ceremony, beseech the genius to repent if it has been responsible for sending the illness. When a man dies it is thought that he has been recalled by his genius. Then the symbol is taken to the crossroads, after his burial, and there broken into pieces. Other neighbouring tribes do not appear to have such a belief, or not in any prominent form.²

Dr. E. W. Smith has shown that the Ba-ila have ideas which are not dissimilar. These are connected with a person's name, and the genius is called in fact "a person's namesake", because the name given to him after birth is that of the protecting genius, probably his grandfather. "A man's guardian spirit, his tutelary genius, is the reincarnate spirit within him: shall we say, is himself. The genius is not only within him, but, in a sense, external to himself, protecting and guiding him. . . . All people have these attendant spirits, from the time the birth name is conferred until death." All good fortune is ascribed to the help of the namesake: wealth, fame, escape from danger,

¹ *A Sudanese Kingdom*, pp. 206-208.

² *Tribal Studies in Northern Nigeria*, ii, p. 607.

or any other good thing. Medicines that are used to procure prosperity serve but to further the good offices of the guardian spirit; every available means being adopted to work together for good. If a fatal accident still happens to a man, it is supposed that the guardian spirit has been angered for some reason and has abandoned his ward. The genius speaks to a man in dreams, or in the low voice that only a man himself can hear speaking within his breast; what we should call the voice of conscience.¹

Thus ideas of a genius or conscience are found on both sides of the African continent. Indeed, does not the European conception of conscience have something in common with the African ideas? A voice that speaks within, urging to right and condemning wrong. A spirit that is related to man, and yet partakes of the divine, and that is different from our own soul, and unaffected by the accidents that befall our mortal frame.

¹ *Ila-speaking Peoples*, ii, pp. 156-158.

SPIRITS OF THE DEPARTED

THE lot of the soul and spirit of man after death, as conceived by African thinkers, should throw light on the idea of the soul in general.

"At death", says Dr. Smith of Ba-ila belief, "the man becomes metamorphosed. The spirit is freed from the body and enters the unknown spirit-world where it awaits the time of its reincarnation. The 'soul' of the man now changes; it is no longer mere 'stuff' but a person . . . which hovers around the grave, lives in trees and houses. This is the normal process; but it may be disturbed by the action of the mysterious force in *musamo* (medicine), by taking which a man may extract an essence from his body which transforms into an animal. So that the one person now becomes three distinct entities."¹

The various and confusing beliefs concerning the destiny of the soul or of influences proceeding from it, are illustrated by this writer from the example of a dead chief Sezongo. He was supposed to have appeared in the form of a tortoise, also in two young lions, then reborn in his grandson; while all the time offerings were still made at the grave of the dead chief to his departed spirit. "The question occurs to a European—it would not occur to a native—where is Sezongo? At the grave where today he is 'worshipped', in the tortoise, in the lions, or in the boy running about the village? There seems to be either a curious confusion of thought or a conception of the 'soul' as bipartite or tripartite."²

Similar confusing ideas are found in West Africa, and the European who seeks to systematize, which is indeed a contribution that he may make, must be very wary not to read into African thought what is not there, and to keep closely to what the Africans themselves say. The older men have in their ranks thinkers who have meditated upon ultimate problems, although often they have not posed their questions in ways that seem logical to us. The younger men, who have been affected by European education, are tempted to invent explanations that are not true to their own traditions, and that may derive from European religion and philosophy.

¹ *Ila-speaking Peoples*, ii, p. 163.

² *Ibid.*, ii, pp. 126-127.

The terminology to be used in speaking of departed souls needs discrimination. A number of writers speak of "ghosts" for departed spirits in general. But the word "ghost" is best confined to its normal denotation in English, of a dead person appearing to the living, an apparition, a spectre. Whereas of those who have died, but are believed still to be living in an invisible world beyond the grave, it seems better to speak of them as the spirits of the departed; the disembodied spirit as distinguishable from the soul or spirit of a person still living on earth.

LOWER GOLD COAST AND LOWER IVORY COAST

Among the Ashanti, it is believed that different fates await the various spiritual powers of man. His body- and blood-soul (*abusua*), which forms the physical frame and life, becomes after death a spirit ancestor (*samān*, the word used for ancestors in general). It goes to the world of spirits where it awaits re-birth, through a woman of the same clan.

The inner spirit (*'kra*) seems to accompany the blood-soul into the world of spirits, and it may leave the body of the dying man before he draws his final breath.

The totemic spirit (*ntoro*) is now separated from the body-soul, and does not go with it to the spirit-world. It joins the spirit or god (*obosom*, the word used of gods in general), and awaits reincarnation through a male of the same totemic group.

The outward, personality-soul (*sunsum*) is closely associated with this totemic spirit, and the two words are sometimes used interchangeably. It appears to accompany the totemic spirit, and to be reborn in the male line.

The word for the departed spirit (*samān*) is never used of living mortals, nor of anything pertaining to them. It is used of the dead, and sometimes of the form in which they appear to the living, but in inoffensive ways. It is distinct from another word (*sasa*) used of haunting or frightening apparitions of wandering phantoms, ghosts properly so called. The *asamanfo* are the spirits of the ancestors, who receive offerings at various intervals.

A child who is born into this world is believed to come from the world of spirits (*samandow*). Its first hair is cut off and is called "spirit's hair"; hair is said to be used as money in the spirit-world. Its excreta is known as "spirit's excreta", and its cooing as "the language of spirits".

When a man is dying, watchers at the bedside wait to per-

form the final rites to speed the spirit on its way. At the moment when the spirit leaves the body, the attendants pour a few drops of water down the throat of the dying man, asking him not to permit any evil to come from the world to which he is travelling. Therein is expressed the desire to ensure a good departure, and also to prevent any unwonted return of the spirit. Old men are fearful of dying without having someone at hand to perform this final rite, and hence they will always have a child with them, even if going out on a short journey. The dying man is thought to have a steep hill to climb to reach the land of the dead, and his dying gasps are taken as proof of this. We have seen that there is a ceremony of separating his spirit from the family.

Children are not given full funeral rites, and some are even treated in an insulting manner, so that they may not return in another child who would be equally weak and short-lived as his predecessor. But this does not necessarily mean that a child is not thought to have a soul like an adult. Their spirit seems to be thought of as going to the world of departed spirits, in the same way as adult spirits, but not to be capable of causing harm to those who remain on earth, as adults may do.¹

The Gã think that the dead remain near their earthly homes for a time, till the flesh has decayed. Then they cross a river to the land of the dead, but they may go back to their homes after a few days there. The dead are believed to hover round their houses, sometimes as bats. The departed spirits are respected and offered food, so that they may protect the family and shower blessings upon it. But they are regarded with awe, and familiarity with them is not sought. At night people turn their stools on their sides lest the dead should sit on them. If the dead are mentioned by name, one adds at once, "it is dark. Go away." No one says evil things about the dead, because they "carry a cudgel". *De mortuis nil nisi bonum.*²

The Agni of the Ivory Coast believe that the departed spirits may often return to the huts where they died, and hover around in the evening. Agni widows wear little bells attached to their feet, because it is thought that the deceased spirits do not like the sound, and so they will not come to share the bed of those with whom they had intercourse while on earth. This belief suggests that the dead are thought to retain something of their sexual passions for a time, even though it may be dangerous

¹ *Religion and Art in Ashanti*, pp. 148-149, 319.

² *Religion and Medicine of the Gã*, pp. 202-203.

for mortals to have relations with them. The offerings of food and drink made to the departed may suggest that they are thought to have appetites like mortals. But this is more apparent than real, and the African believes that the spirit only extracts the inner essence from the food offered; just as the spirit intercourse would not produce children, but might result in sterility.¹

The Adjukru believe that when a man dies his spirit leaves him and goes away. As it departs it cries like a night-bird, or a new-born baby. The word for the departed spirit expresses this: "weeping spirit" (*ayn aby*). The spirit goes off towards the sea and the village of the dead. The Alladian tribe, who live on the Ivory Coast seaboard, are said to be able always to see these passing spirits.

The personality-soul of man (*egy*) is thought by the Adjukru to stay near its earthly home for three months, and it is called "the dead man" (*ayn-esu*). It may be seen by seers who possess second sight. At night it joins other souls in the village cemetery. It is this soul which is believed to reincarnate, in part at least, and which may appear to men in dreams.

The ancestral souls (*lagy*) are believed to supervise the people of their family, and to obtain favours for them. This is one reason why, although many of the Adjukru are now nominal Christians from the preaching of the prophet Harris, yet they hesitate to accept Christian marriage. For their teachers tell them that in Christian marriage it is Jesus who becomes head of the house. But Jesus may be distant and strange to them, whereas their ancestors are known and felt to be near at hand, and natural guardians of the family. If a calamity happens in the village, the ancestral spirits are called upon for succour.

The neighbouring Dida tribe call the spirit of a dead man *kuo*, from the word *ku*, which means to die. The Bete use a similar word, and think that the departed spirit stays by the body for four days, and then goes to the village of the dead underground (*kuduho*). It is remarkable that this root-word for death is found over a large area of West Africa, at least from the Ivory Coast to Nigeria. One might be tempted to connect it with like Egyptian words, but such comparisons are extremely risky and linguistic evidence is always tenuous in Africa from the lack of written documents.

The Baoule, Gouro, and Kanga-Bonou, of the central Ivory Coast, believe that the dead descend the river Bandama to the

¹ *Religion, mœurs et Coutumes des Agnis*, p. 124.

sea; and also that they dwell underground, whence they can appear at times to their families and demand food, becoming visible especially in dreams. The personal soul of man survives, if it is not eaten by witches, and will reincarnate in a woman of the same tribe.¹

UPPER GOLD COAST, UPPER IVORY COAST, SUDAN

In the Northern Territories there are likewise distinct words used for the spirits of the dead. As *sia* or *sigā* are used for souls of the living, so variants of the word *kyima* denote the spirits of the dead. In Isal the word used (*lele*) is also employed in the singular to denote a shrine.

The Nankanse believe that on dying the spirit of a woman may enter, or use as a shrine, various objects: a bracelet or anklet, a grindstone, a hoe, or a chameleon such as is modelled on grain-stores. Here offerings are made; but at the same time the spirits are thought to live in the spirit-world.

At the funeral of an Isala, his younger brother and heir offers a cow and speaks to the corpse, telling him to take the cow to the spirit-world, and not to come back in dreams to prevent people from sleeping.

The Lobi, and other tribes, think that children born of a widow are "spirit children" of the late husband. The widows may receive lovers and bear children, after a due interval has elapsed from the death of their spouse. During the early days of widowhood, women in most tribes are not allowed to speak to men or even reply to salutations, and are accompanied by other women who speak for them. The spirit of the deceased husband would harm both the woman and any man who had intercourse with her prematurely. Later, a son may marry one of his father's widows, provided that it is not his own mother, but the children are thought to belong to the deceased parent; the real father will call his child "younger brother", and the child will call his father "elder brother".²

Most tribes practise the widespread African custom of taking the corpse through a special "spirit doorway", used for dead bodies only, or else knocking down a part of the wall to allow the passage of the bier. The idea behind this practice seems to be that of avoiding any contamination of the real doorway by

¹ *Nègres Gouro et Gagou*, p. 221.

² *Tribes of the Ashanti Hinterland*, pp. 295, 504, 545. Compare the Hebrew Levirate marriage in which the first child of the second husband was reckoned as the offspring of the deceased husband.

the spirit of the departed. Westermarck has noted similar practices in Morocco.¹

When a Kulango of the north-eastern Ivory Coast dies, the eldest son of the deceased places a fowl by his parent's head and says to the corpse, "You have gone whither we shall all go; we offer this fowl so that you may procure water to drink on the road". The fowl is killed and its blood, believed to contain its soul, is poured out to the corpse. The departed spirit is thought to travel to the country of the dead. But there is a parallel belief that the soul stays near its tomb and its earthly home, and also in the return of the soul in a child or an animal sacred to the tribe. This may be a tripartite conception of the soul, or belief in emanating powers.²

The Menkiera, of the upper Ivory Coast, like some other nearby tribes, build huts of earth for the spirits of the departed, about six inches high or more. The ancestors are believed to lodge in these huts, and also under the earth, and from thence they supervise the affairs of their families remaining on earth.³

The Bambara attribute the death of the body either to the maleficent activities of witches, "soul-eaters", or to the power of gods or spiritual powers. Possibly the most ancient and fundamental belief is that death is always unnatural, and therefore must be due to witchcraft. The idea of natural death, as Europeans conceive it, has hardly entered into their mind, but an approach to it is discernible in the attribution of death to the power of gods, for these correspond in their thought to natural forces in our own views.

The spirit or vital force of men and animals may be thought to cause death. Of a child who dies the Bambara say: "It is the spirit (*nyama*) of his father", or, "It is the spirit of a bird". Since some spirits live in trees, the death of a man may be thought to have been caused through the displeasure of this spirit when a tree has been climbed or cut, and it is said, "He has climbed a bad tree", or, "That is the way of spirits". Euphemisms are often employed to avoid naming death directly: "He has returned back", "He has ended his career", and for married people, "He has changed his dwelling".

The Bambara believe that the soul stays for a time with the corpse, and it would seem from their habit of using parts of the

¹ *Ritual and Belief in Morocco*, ii, pp. 454 ff.

² *Le Noir de Bondoukou*, p. 199.

³ *Le Noir du Soudan*, p. 104.

body, e.g. the skull, for making particularly formidable charms, that even the bones of a skeleton still contain some spiritual force or emanation.

Death dissolves the partnership of the various elements of the human being. The soul and its associated force (*dya, ni*) are thought of as going to the water or remaining near to the family altar; both may return to earth in a new-born child. The spirit or character (*tere*) becomes the departed spirit (*nyama*) which may pursue enemies with vengeance, or be propitiated to give blessings to the family.

The departed spirit is associated with the earth, both as living underground, and as giving fertility to the crops. But at the same time, like other tribes, the Bambara believe that the spirits of the departed wander about, hover round the grave or their homes, appear in dreams. Perhaps the most ancient belief is that the ancestors enter into animals, the totem animal of their clan. But this idea is disappearing, and Islamic faith is gaining ground.

There is a cult of the dead, associated with a secret society. This is called by a name meaning "suction", perhaps because the dead are believed to suck the blood of the sacrifice which is offered to them; the blood representing the soul of the offering, while the flesh is eaten by the suppliants.¹

TOGO AND DAHOMEY

In the north of Togoland there is a tribe, called the Moba, concerning whose beliefs we have a little information. They use a word *tarem* (perhaps related to the Bambara *tere*) to denote the breath of the nose, and also the vital breath of man. This word also means the soul of man, that which gives him life. When a man dies his spirit returns to God (*Yendu*, God, sun; the Mossi and Isala of the Gold Coast also use a word for God which is from the same root as the word for the sun, but this does not mean that they are sun-worshippers).

The soul (*tarem*) leaves the man just before his final gasp. Those who leave children behind them become worshipped (*patele*). It is said that when God made man he took a heap of earth and pounded it, pouring on the blood of a chicken. This is still believed to be done for every human being that is born. Everybody in Moba and Gourma country has a little cone of earth in their compound, as an individual altar, and both the

¹ *La Religion Bambara*, pp. 37-40, 109-113; L. Tauxier, *Histoire des Bambara*, 1942, p. 209; G. Dieterlen, *loc. cit.*

altar and the God to whom sacrifice of chickens' blood is made there are called by the same name (*Yendu*).¹

Among the Ewe peoples, various fates await the souls of man. The bodily shadow or core (*wɛsagũ*) is thought by some to give an account to God of the actions of the deceased person; hence it is called the "messenger". But all the same, it is believed to remain in the grave, and not to go to the world beyond. If the person's actions were good, then God will give him a good place in the afterworld, and will not delay in sending him back to earth; but if his bodily deeds were evil his soul will be annihilated, including the bodily core.

The personality-soul of man (*ye* or *sɛmɛdõ*) leaves the body at death, and becomes a disembodied spirit (called *kutits* or *kufits*, at first, from the Yoruba word for death, *iku*). The personality-soul goes into the grave until the moment when the grave-digger places the inverted jar in the opening, and calls out to everyone to stand back. As the jar is placed in position the soul is thought to ascend to God.

The soul is the man himself, and so it is called before God to answer for any evil that it has committed and to be punished accordingly. Later, after the performance of certain ceremonies (described in my previous work), the deceased person is fetched from the river, where lesser souls are thought to reside, and is beatified (becoming a *tvodũ*, "water-god"). This disembodied soul is thought to be able to eat and drink the "soul" of offerings made to it. If it had been married while on earth, and had out-lived its family, it will find them again in the hereafter; otherwise it will await the arrival of its wife and children. The departed one will live in the bosom of its family, and some say that it may even beget children in the beyond, but that these would not come to earth.

The human spirit (*se* or *lindõ*) returns to God at death. Like the Ashanti '*kra*' it may leave the body before the final breath is drawn, but it provides the condition by which death becomes possible. At the time willed by God the spirit leaves the body, and death ensues. If the person to whom the spirit was attached during life is annihilated by God for its misdeeds, then the spirit is separated from this evil being; it cannot share in such destruction, but is given another person to protect by God. Similarly, the protecting genius (*jots*) cannot participate in annihilation, but it seeks reincarnation or association with another being.

¹ R. P. Sournin, *La Divination chez les Moba*, in *Notes Africaines*, No. 35, pp. 15-16, and 12-15.

Jakob Spieth, in Togo, distinguished two sorts of death: good death and sudden death. Good death is presaged by sickness, which is its messenger. Bad death comes to those who fall in war, are killed in the hunt, die of smallpox, commit suicide, or are murdered.¹

If a woman dies in pregnancy, the grave can only receive one person, so the sexton removes the foetus, and buries it in another grave. The unborn child had not come alive, but all the same it possessed or was possessed by spiritual forces and so was an embryonic person. Here, as elsewhere, it was an old practice to make a "soul-gate" in the wall of the compound through which the corpse could be carried out; this practice is often neglected today by the more sophisticated coastal inhabitants.

It is thought that, if the funeral ceremonies have been adequately performed, a shooting star may be seen travelling towards the sea. These meteorites are believed to be the souls of men recently dead, travelling to the sea and the world beyond. The soul of a deceased person is thought to be passing by when an undue silence occurs in conversation; the guardian spirit of those present stops their mouths, lest the passing spirit take away their voice, which is a sign of life.²

SOUTHERN NIGERIA

Among the Yoruba the personal soul or heart (*okān*) becomes at death a disembodied spirit (*oku*, a term also applied to the corpse). The soul has to go to God to be judged for its deeds, and dwells in the place of departed spirits (*ipo-oku*) until the times comes for its reincarnation. The spirit (*emi* or *iwān*) is not affected by these events, and returns to God to await his orders as to its action in the future.

The Yoruba have important ceremonies connected with the departed spirits, which have entered into Ewe country though they are not indigenous there, and which are closely paralleled among the Edo, Ibo, and Jukun. These are the practices of the Egūgū society (described in *West African Religion*), which consist in the apparition of masked and robed figures supposed to represent the spirits of the departed returned to visit their relatives. These visits take place forty days after death, and again on annual occasions. The rites forty days after death are called "creation of the dead" (*is-eku*). Thus the departed are

¹ *Religion der Eweer*, p. 233.

² *La Géomancie*, p. 379; *Dahomey*, i, 379n, ii, 236.

thought to be near at hand and accessible, as well as in the world beyond or reincarnating.

The Ibo think that when a man dies his soul goes to the unknown world, but in another sense it remains near to his own house. Finally it is believed to enter into a stick, which is called *okpensi*. This does not happen at once after death, but only when the "second burial" rite has been performed. As among so many tribes there is a necessary rite, called "second burial", which may be performed at varying intervals after the first somewhat hasty interment, when all the relatives can assemble, and the dead one be formally despatched to the world beyond.

Until the time of the second burial the disembodied spirit wanders about its old haunts, entering into houses and farms and interesting itself in the business of its own family and the whole clan. It is thought to participate in meals, part of which are put at crossroads for such spirits, and in particular it fancies kola nuts. But the spirit will not receive offerings of food in its own house until the ceremonies of the second burial have been accomplished. If these are delayed the spirit is discontented with such neglect, and it may disturb the dwellers in the house.

When the final rites have been performed, the spirit is believed to take up its abode in the *okpensi*, which is a piece of wood about a foot long, with a head at each end. This is put in the room of the deceased man, with other gods. The spirit can now see all that goes on in the house, and can report on this to the other spirits of the underworld. Offerings are made to him, of kola nuts and a fowl, goat, or cow, according to the importance of the occasion and the favour required. Some of the blood and feathers are stuck on the stick, and the spirit is requested to preserve the family from wicked men and spirits.

Similar rites are performed for the spirits of women. Offerings are first made at the crossroads. After the second burial, the spirit will be free to enter the homes both of the woman's husband and of her father, and finally to reside in an *okpensi*.

The departed spirits in general are called *maw*, the dead, or the elders; terms which are applied both to the departed themselves, and to the symbols which represent them. In some regions the ancestral symbols are made of posts covered with brass or copper manillas, the ancient currency of the Guinea Coast traders, and called "Faces of the Fathers". In front of these symbols the "doctors" seek to enter into contact with the departed spirits.

The chief sacrifices to the dead parents are made yearly;

some five months after the seed yams have been planted, and a month before the new ones are eaten. The father is sacrificed to in the morning, and the mother at night, and protection and fertility are requested. In addition to receiving offerings in the beyond, part of the soul is thought to reincarnate again on earth.¹

Similar symbols and offerings are made by the Ibibio, and some of the eastern Nigerian Bantu. The Ibibio believe that departed spirits (*ekpo*) are near to men; and their invocation plays an important role in life. Diviners are said to be able to talk to the dead, and even to materialize them with the blood of a sacrifice. They hover round the village, as well as existing in a world beyond. Some emanation of the vital force remains attached to the earthly family and village. When a child is to be born the father gives an offering to the family fathers, and if he neglects this the spirits may steal the soul of the unborn child. Sometimes the departed get very restless, and they crowd to places where men have died, to share in the offerings made there, by taking the essence of the blood.²

NORTHERN NIGERIA

The Jukun think that the body becomes a mere corpse (*aki*) at death, but that the soul (*dindî*) continues to live. The soul joins the ancestors (*aku*), and is called by the same name as they, a title which, with differing inflections, is applied to the king, to tutelary divinities, and to ancestral spirits. The soul is thought to struggle against death, and to overcome it by rising to new life in the world beyond.

The Jukun make offerings of food and drink to their ancestors, through old corn rubbers used as symbols. The departed are thought to depend on this food for their sustenance, and also to need clothing, which is placed near them to protect them from the cold afterlife. The spirits are believed to consume the inner soul of these offerings.

The departed are thought both to live in the afterworld, and also to be present with their relatives on earth. They see and know all that goes on here, and so men are careful of their words and works, knowing that they are surrounded by a cloud of witnesses. If a man wishes to know the will of his departed parents, he uses a divining apparatus by means of which he believes he can get into touch with the spiritual realm. He

¹ *Niger Ibos*, pp. 283-285.

² *Life in Southern Nigeria*, pp. 123-127.

prays every morning to his ancestors, that they may favour him with their presence throughout the day, and also that they may protect his house if he is absent.

A Jukun may worship many ancestors, but in particular those who are senior but not too remote from him, especially his grandfather. A departed spirit cannot help or hinder anyone who was senior to it on earth; the deceased cannot hurt its parents on earth, nor a younger brother his elder. Usually the departed spirit is active within its family group alone, though sometimes it may disturb the whole clan.¹

The Pabir, of northern Nigeria, believe that when a man dies his soul joins that of his grandfather in the beyond, but that it comes back to the village every year when there is a great feast known as "spirit" ("ghost", *Mambita*). This is a harvest festival, for all departed spirits, and in particular for the ancestors of the chief. The spirits eat the soul of the offerings made. The neighbouring Kilba use a similar word for a departed spirit, but do not celebrate the annual feast. They have a family cult, conducted by the heads of households, with pieces of pot from the graves of the departed used as symbols.²

The Chamba have peculiar rites connected with the second burial, which are paralleled by some of the Jukun. The ceremony consists in handing over the deceased into the care of his ancestors. It takes place at the crossroads, where the spirits of the departed are supposed to congregate, and to pass on their way from the world beyond to earthly villages. In leaving the departed spirit outside the town it is hoped that death will leave also, instead of staying around to kill others. There are special rites for warriors, and for members of secret societies, like Tsera and Vara. Tsera is a tutelary genius, and personification of the spirits of the ancestors. Like some other divinities of secret societies, he is imagined to come at night to take away the spirit of his deceased worshipper, beating the walls of huts with a stick as he departs with the dead man's soul, and leaving broken branches as evidence of his visit. The Vara is another tutelary genius, personifying the first paternal aunt of the chief. She appears publicly, impersonated by a man in a mask and fibre costume, to mourn the decease of any member of the society.

The Mambila call the departed *ku-ru*, a word probably connected with Jukun and Yoruba etymology. When a man dies,

¹ *A Sudanese Kingdom*, pp. 202, 213-214.

² *Tribal Studies in Northern Nigeria*, I, p. 160.

the impersonated spirits come to take his soul into the bush where the departed assemble. Before the corpse is buried these impersonators sit by it all night, march round it three times at dawn, and pretend to take away the man's soul into the bush. When they have gone another member tells the bereaved relatives not to mourn overmuch, for the *kuru* are in the habit of adding to their numbers, and the lost one is not dead but has gone to the *kuru*. Annual offerings are made in the dry season to the departed. The corpse is buried facing westwards, as it is said that man comes into the world from the east and goes west at death (like the sun).

The Jibu, and also the Kentu of the Cameroons, like the Jukun, have important ceremonies of "releasing the mouth-cloth". Three days after death, the brother of the deceased goes to the grave, and tells the corpse that it has recovered after three days' illness; a libation of beer is made which is called "the beer for the opening of the hand". The fact of death is thus denied: the deceased has been fighting hard for three days, but he overcomes death on the third day, and unclenches his hand through drinking the refreshing draught. After eight and again after fifteen days there are further rites, in which the dead person is taken to his ancestors, and receives the "beer of releasing the mouth-cloth". There is a strange resemblance to the Egyptian ritual of opening the mouth of the dead.¹

The Anga, in northern Nigeria, believe that the god Nan receives the souls of the righteous at death. The Dukawa and Kamberi think that the good spirits are met after death by their friends and relatives, who give them abundant food, drink and clothing. Many other plateau tribes (Irigwe, Ba, Sangawa, Pakara) think that the dead also hover near to their old homes, in the trees, awaiting a chance of rebirth into a woman of the same tribe.²

The Kagoro think that there is a stream which divides life from death, like the Styx, and that when a man is ill his soul travels to this stream. The spirits of the departed are gathered on yonder shore, and they decide whether the sick man may cross the stream by a bridge. If he is allowed to join them his body dies, and the soul leaves this world and is greeted by friends and relatives in the beyond. At the same time, the spirit remains in touch with the terrestrial abodes, living on the hills and haunting the groves. It has a similar form to that

¹ *Tribal Studies in Northern Nigeria*, i, pp. 346-367, 555; ii, p. 511.

² C. K. Meek, *The Northern Tribes of Nigeria*, 1925, ii, pp. 35-37.

worn on earth, and hunts and fights as of yore. But it is homeless and hungry, and therefore it is the duty of its surviving relatives to supply it with food and drink, lest the spirit be angry and visit its careless friends with sickness and misfortune.¹

The Kwotto believe that when a man dies his paternal spirit (*ekiti*) goes to the sky, where it is associated with water and the rain, the male fertilizing element in nature, while the maternal soul (*kofi*) goes into the earth, the source of female fertilizing power. Allusion has been made to painting female corpses red, and even among the Muslim Fulani the hands are dyed with henna. A male corpse is washed with water, which in addition to its cleansing value suggests a connexion with water and rain. The royal ancestors are believed to live under or near water, and they are called upon to provide rain in times of drought. A female corpse has the loins wrapped in a black cloth, perhaps a symbol of the underground regions, and a male corpse has a blue cloth, which may indicate the sky.²

The Hausa think that the good are separated from the bad at death. The good go to a world much like this earth: they may also be reborn in grandchildren on earth. Some think that departed souls will return to harm their survivors if this is not prevented, and to this end thorns are placed on a corpse to prevent the soul's return to earth.³

Many of these ideas relative to the departed are widespread in Africa. The spirits of the dead are thought to take a great interest in the lives of their survivors on earth, to whom they still belong, and in whose family they may be reborn. They protect mortals, if they themselves are duly cared for, and harm them if neglected in cultus. Sickness is commonly attributed to the influence of dead ancestors, and their graves become shrines honoured for averting this calamity. Fertility and harvests depend much upon the goodwill of the departed.⁴

Even the Muhammadan Moroccans believe that the soul (*roh*) of a dead man does not leave the body at once, and can join in meals arranged by his survivors. Mostly they imagine the soul to remain for three days by the body, and then to go to limbo (*Barzah*) awaiting the resurrection. But at Tangier the soul is thought to stay by the grave for forty days, and others think that it returns to the grave on the fortieth day, when food is

¹ C. K. Meek, *The Northern Tribes of Nigeria*, 1925, ii, pp. 35-37.

² *Red Men of Nigeria*, pp. 291-296.

³ A. J. N. Tremearne, *Hausa Superstitions and Customs*, 1913, p. 118.

⁴ Cf. A. I. Richards, *Land, Labour and Diet in Northern Rhodesia*, 1939, pp. 351-380.

placed on the grave. The departed spirit is believed to visit its old home on Thursdays, and to be in its grave on Fridays, and on occasions when the relatives visit the grave. The relatives cannot see the soul, though it can see them and is pleased with their presence.¹

Brief reference may be made, for the sake of comparison, and not of completeness, to beliefs of some East African tribes. The Bari, of the eastern Sudan, consider that the spirit of the departed partakes of the inner essence of food offered to it; the food is left in a vessel overnight, and consumed by the living on the following day. The Azande take first-fruits to the ancestral shrines, where the spirits are supposed to partake of them invisibly, and to leave the outward part of them to perish.²

The Ba-ila bury food in the grave for the spirit of the dead man, who will eat its inner essence; cattle, and in olden days slaves, women and children were offered for the same reason, although some assert that these sacrifices are made to feed and console the mourners, or that they are the belongings of the deceased, who would be angry if they were not sent to accompany him. Departed spirits are called "changed people", from a word meaning to be metamorphosed. They are thought to be kindly or neutral, but liable to become dangerous if neglected. The spirits live near the grave, in the house, in a tree or an animal, as well as being thought to go underground or to the east, whence the tribe originated.³

Some Bantu say that when the body dies "the spirit [soul] has gone". The departed spirit is thought of as a miniature counterpart of the deceased, but it appears in dreams exactly as it existed in life. There is found, once again, the complex belief that the spirit may appear in dreams to the living, hover around the grave and village of its survivors where it may be invoked, and also that it goes to a world of spirits generally located in the subterranean regions. Some believe that they can enter into animals or possess mediums.⁴

The Baganda have mostly adopted Christianity, but have retained some of their own ideas about the departed. Although their rites for the dead do not appear to have been so elaborate as those of southern Bantu, or many West Africans, yet they

¹ *Ritual and Belief in Morocco*, ii, pp. 534 ff.

² *Pagan Tribes of the Nilotic Sudan*, pp. 302, 522.

³ *Ila-speaking Peoples*, ii, pp. 117-119, 132.

⁴ *Bantu-speaking Tribes of South Africa*, p. 248.

believe firmly in the presence of the departed near to their graves as well as in heaven. The whirlwinds that spin about in the heat of the day are passing spirits, and children are warned to keep away from them, for they may injure those whom they meet in their path. The departed spirit is not in uninterrupted touch with his descendants, but he can visit them at times, in particular by possessing one of his relatives through whose mouth a message is believed to come from the beyond. This may be inconsistent with Christianity, but how many Europeans still believe in ghosts, as well as in heaven, or in messages received from the dead through spiritualistic mediums?¹

Father Tempels says of Bantu belief that "the departed live a diminished life, they are reduced vital energies. What they have been able to acquire in deep knowledge of vital and natural forces, can only help them to reinforce the life of man living on the earth. The same applies to their superior force due to seniority which can only be applied to reinforce the life of the progeny which remains alive. The dead one who can no longer enter into relationship with the living on the earth is 'perfectly dead', say the black people. They signify thereby that this vital force, already reduced by decease, reaches the limit of its diminution of energy, which fails completely through lack of the capacity to exercise its vital influence on the living. This is considered as the worst of calamities for the dead one himself. The spirits seek to enter into contact with the living and to pursue their vital action on the Earth."²

¹ *An African People in the Twentieth Century*, pp. 224-226.

² *La Philosophie Bantoue*, p. 44.

GHOSTLY APPARITIONS

BELIEF in the occasional apparition of ghosts of departed spirits is common to most races of mankind. In West Africa such apparitions are particularly believed to occur in the case of those who have died a violent or unnatural death. As in ancient Egypt, the souls of suicides, murdered persons, criminals, and those whose death had been violent, all were thought to have died before their destined time. Hence these souls were thought to remain in the neighbourhood of their bodies, until the fulfilment of the period planned for their mortal life. Witches were believed by the Egyptians to use such wandering souls as their tools, and to entrust them with errands, such as harming horses which were due to run in the circus, making them ill, paralysing them, or doing anything to stop them from winning the race.¹

Dr. Westermarck says of Moorish belief that saints who have died may appear in human or animal form to the living, but ordinary folk quite positively do not walk. "I remember how heartily my friends in the tribe of Jbel Hbib laughed when I told them that many Christians believe in ghosts." It is held possible for the dead to come and see their friends, which they do in a friendly manner, but they are quite invisible to those whom they visit.²

The word "ghost" will be taken here in the dictionary definition of "a dead person appearing to the living", an apparition, a spectre. It is the same as a phantom, but distinct from the phantasm which is "a supposed vision of an absent person" who may be dead or living.

The apparition of a ghost is normally feared in West Africa, and is harmful, though at times ghosts may appear to give warning of impending danger, notably in the chase. The hunter who has been thus warned will consult the diviner, and will carefully watch over his future actions, lest he fall into the danger of which he has been forewarned, or anger the ghost by neglect of its premonition. These ghosts are not to be confused with tutelary spirits of the chase, many of which are not thought to have been human, who live like fairies and dryads

¹ G. Maspero, *New Light on Ancient Egypt*, 1909.

² *Ritual and Belief in Morocco*, ii, p. 546.

in the forest, and who may help or hinder hunters, appearing in human or animal form to them, and even making a blood-pact with them.

Sickness may be indicated by a doctor as resulting from the influence of some noisome ghost. In some places the only remedy is thought to be in fighting against this perverted spirit; the ghost will be insulted and injured, and efforts will be made to drive it away by drumming and shouting. His corpse may be dug up, the body burnt, and the ashes scattered to the winds. Then it may be assumed that the evil spirit has been sent back to that country from which no traveller returns, to the place of nothingness, from whence the dead can exercise no influence upon the vital force of the living, being now "perfectly dead".

LOWER GOLD COAST AND IVORY COAST

Sometimes the Ashanti shave the head of a corpse, marking it with the usual trio of colours—red, white and black, in stripes, the object being to render the dead soul easily recognizable if it walks as a ghost.

A man who commits suicide is called a "wandering spirit", one who can find no rest and is forever on the search for its missing head. It is refused entry into the land of spirits until the arrival of the predestined time of its death, for it had wrongly cut the thread of its appointed time, and must wander to and fro between this world and the next. When, finally, the soul of a suicide was reborn on this earth, it would come again as the spirit of a man who had died an unclean death (*tofo sasa*), a cruel and murderous man who would probably come to the same bad end in this life.¹

The word normally used for a haunting ghost is *sasa* (or *sesa*) in Twi, of which the root means to pursue, or to fix the eye upon something. It is also used in sentences of persons who dislike or are prejudiced against one. In his dictionary of the Ashanti and Fanti languages, Christaller makes a clear distinction between the spirit of a departed person (*samān*) and a ghost (*sasa* or *sesa*), the latter being an evil spirit, and often meaning the effect of mischief done by a spirit. In this sense, Christaller says, one could not use the word for a departed spirit; when spirits are thought of as evil they are termed *sasa*.

This word can only be used of the dead, but it is not confined to men, for animals and things have ghosts as well. The

¹ *Religion and Art in Ashanti*, p. 28.

Akan peoples do not usually think that material objects have a spirit (*'kra*), but they consider that they have an inner power (*sasa*), a vital force comparable to the Melanesian "mana".

The *sasa* is an invisible force in man, animals and things, which may influence the lives and thoughts of others, and may cast a spell upon them or do them harm if interfered with in any way. In particular men who take life, such as executioners, butchers, and hunters, have to take great precautions to avoid the revenge of the ghost of the man and animal, and even woodcutters who cut down some great forest tree have to protect themselves.

The *sasa*, being a hurtful power, must be laid at any cost, so as to nullify its influence. In funeral rites great care is taken to appease and carefully speed on its way the spirit of the departed. When a criminal or other victim was to be executed in olden days, a powerful charm was placed upon his knees, while his head was being cut off. The aim of this was to stop the vengeful ghost from coming back to harm either the executioner, or even the chief at whose orders the execution had been done. What we should call remorse, when a murderer feels forced to confess his crime, would be viewed by the Akan as clearly showing the power of the *sasa* of the victim upon his murderer.

Children were not given such elaborate funeral ceremonies as adults, because their spirits were thought to be insufficiently developed and incapable of returning to haunt the living.

Animals also have this power, but there is a hierarchy of lesser and greater powers, as among human beings, and not all the spirits of animals are thought to be of equal importance, or at least as not possessing the same degree of power. The animals are divided broadly into two classes, those which have a powerful spirit and are called *sasa* animals (*sasa-mmoo*), and those which are not thought to be important or not vindictive, and which are simply termed "beasts" (*mmoo*).

The *sasa* animals include not only some which are obviously dangerous or large, but others which are small and apparently insignificant. This suggests that there is a connexion with totemism, now partially obscured, but which has helped to determine the belief in which animals have the most vital force. These animals include bongo, elephant, roan, waterbuck, duyker. The bongo is the most feared. When a hunter chases this animal he always carries an important charm, made from a root, as an antidote against the ghost of the bongo. When

he has killed it, and it is very wily, he cries out in the same funeral lament as he would use on the death of either of his own parents. Rites must be performed to avert the vengeance of the ghost of the elephant or the bongo.

Another type of ghost or pursuing spirit is the ghost-witch (*sasa-bonsam*). This is supposed to haunt the forest, to trip up hunters, oppose the human race, and particularly the true priests. These evil monsters are said to be in league with witches and workers of black magic, who may invoke their aid in foul concoctions. It has been suggested that the original of this evil being may have been the gorilla, possibly once haunting the western forests; for the *sasa-bonsam* is said to have long hair all over its body, have long legs, blood-shot eyes, and to sit on high branches of trees.¹

The Gã think that when anyone dies violently or prematurely his spirit wanders about for forty days as a ghost (*otɔfo*). It is savage and angry at having been taken away thus unwontedly, and is jealous of other people's pleasures, dancing and feasting, and especially of sexual intercourse. If it meets anyone coming home late at night from such pleasure, the ghost will chase him till he dies of heart failure. Those who go about late on lawful and sober occupations are not harmed by ghosts, provided that they pretend not to see them. The ghost is easily recognizable from its fiery breath and red mouth; this is said to be so because the ghost's blood was still active at the time of death; but red is a bad colour since witches are thought to give off red light or red smoke, and bad fairies are red (like our red devils). The ghosts weep and groan, and whistle shrilly to other ghosts. They do not like white (a holy colour, used by priests, and a sign of a good aura); and ghosts are thought to be kept away by white clothes, and by painting thresholds and window-sills white. If attacked by a ghost, one should throw a white cloth on to the ground; the ghost will stop to worry the cloth until it is quite dirty, and the person pursued will have time to escape.²

The Agni do their best to protect themselves from the ghosts of women who have died in pregnancy. When this happens all the pregnant women of the village run about in white loincloths, with palm leaves on their bodies and faces covered with white clay. They shout out to frighten away the spirit of the dead one, and laugh at any men who show themselves. Similar dances

¹ *Religion and Art in Ashanti*, pp. 153, 183.

² *Religion and Medicine of the Gã*, pp. 202-203.

are performed in neighbouring villages, and renewed on the eighth day after death. The ashes from the fires used during the funeral, with the shaved hair from those who have been in mourning, are put outside the village. Thus death is thought to be chased away. The unborn child is always removed from its mother's womb.¹

I was told by friends among the Dida, of the lower central Ivory Coast, that dead persons are often met with, in the same form that they had while living on earth. In the village of Make it was widely reported that a certain dead man came back every evening to his compound and hut. Nearly everybody saw him, and my informant swore that he had seen him too. One night, while his wife was asleep, the ghost came into the house while the door was shut, and took his child from off the mother's lap. The child screamed out and the mother awoke; the ghost threw the child down and disappeared. This was taken as circumstantial proof.

The Gouro believe that the dead go about at night, either as harmless and even beneficent beings, giving medicines to those they favour, or else as frightening ghosts, who appear to men and give them a "cold head". The ghosts are called by a name (*mindéri*) which is also given to the human shadow. The *nyama* of the dead may do considerable harm. By this force the dead can appear to men in dreams, or steal his soul, by which he eventually dies. This is held to be proved by the fact that, when corpses were carried round the village in an endeavour to find out the one responsible for the death, sometimes the body only responded when a dead person was named.²

UPPER GOLD COAST, UPPER IVORY COAST, SUDAN

Among the northern tribes, the Mamprusi of Gold Coast and Togo believe that boys and girls who die before adolescence do not go into the world of spirits awaiting rebirth. But they wander near to their earthly homes, where they may often be seen, though they cannot be recognized for they appear shapeless as a cloud or mist. They may be heard crying or groaning, and if the man who meets them runs away in fear they will chase him all the way back to the village, so that he is struck dumb with fright and may die shortly after. But if a man has a brave spirit the ghosts can do him no harm.

¹ H. Mouëzy, *Assinie et le Royaume de Krinjabo*, 1942, pp. 185, 207.

² *Nègres Gouro et Gagou*, pp. 203, 255.

Many tribes think that the little whirlwinds, caused by the midday heat, are wind-devils or ghosts of the dead. If one of these whirlwinds gets near a hut, one of the inmates will throw water or flour on the ground to satisfy it. A prayer will speedily be made to a protecting deity for help, for the ghost may well be injurious.

Some ghosts may serve a good purpose, such as stopping children from stealing. In particular, it is said that they dislike seeing children robbing bees of honey, and will punish them severely.

The Nankanse and Dagomba, of upper Gold Coast and Togo, provide special houses and food for ghosts, but this is to satisfy them and keep them away. At night-time war-cries are often heard, being made in order to frighten off ghosts of dead people who are disturbing their relatives, perhaps in dreams.

The Nankanse also believe that certain herbs will drive away ghosts by their smell. After touching a corpse, all those who have been so occupied will take a certain grass and cow-dung, and rub their hands.

Witches are thought to become troublesome ghosts when they die. If they touch anyone his hair will grow long, and his body thin, and he will eventually die. The ghost of a witch (like the *sasa-bonsam*) has its feet turned back to front.¹

The Mossi think, as do so many tribes, that when a man dies at some distance from his home, his relatives see his phantasm. It is his personal soul (*sigá*), which wanders about during sleep when its owner is living, and appears at death. This phantasm passes by its relative without saying a word, and is only visible to the relative concerned. Frightening ghosts appear at night, to scare those who have neglected ancestral offerings. They are dressed in white, because the dead are buried in white cotton strips.²

The Bobo, of the upper Ivory Coast and Sudan, think of ghosts as the spirits of departed human beings to whom sacrifices have ceased to be offered. Hence they have lost human attachments and wander about in suffering, becoming malevolent. They are hostile to men, and seek especially for the bush, the branches of trees, and thickets.³

The Bambara believe in ghosts, though they are not obsessed with fear of them. They believe that the spirits of the departed

¹ *Tales told in Togoland*, p. 34; *Tribes of the Ashanti Hinterland*, pp. 213, 299.

² *Le Noir du Yatenga*, p. 386.

³ *Le Noir du Soudan*, p. 74.

can return at night to their native villages, clad in white like the shrouds of corpses. They think that an unexpected meeting with a ghost can drive a man mad. But seers and old people may enter into contact with them, and learn occult secrets from them.

They believe in phantasms, telepathic appearances of the dying. The dying person sends out his soul, as in dreams, to pass by his friend without speaking; or it may talk with him, press his hand, or give some proof of its presence. The man who has received such a ghostly visit realizes at once that his friend is dying.

The Bambara think that the spirits of those dead that have been abandoned, to whom no offerings are made, and who for one reason or another cannot hope to be reborn on earth and have descendants, flit about the bush and turn into evil ghosts who torment men because they themselves are in torment. There appears to be some confusion of these ghosts with other spirits that wander about the village, and who are fond of haunting crossroads and tripping people up, of punishing children who climb and break the trees where they perch. Such naughty children are punished with stomach-aches and headaches. Water is sprinkled and food is placed at crossroads by old people, to keep off these troublesome spirits, and also to induce them to send away other evil beings; for the force even of bad spirits may be utilized against other evil powers, if their favour is curried by tempting offerings.¹

TOGO AND DAHOMEY

The Ewe say that the ghosts of those whose lives have not been good haunt the roads at night-time. When a man sees one he says, "I have seen the thing that lives in darkness", or, "Something met me"; the eyes cannot see it but the heart can see a ghost or evil spirit.²

These ghosts are innumerable. They cannot approach God, although some say that they have a guardian spirit (*joko*), explaining this by adding that those whose guardian spirits have had no access to God before they came to the earth die in childhood, or become evildoers.

These ghosts live in agony, wandering among human beings as if they cannot wholly get rid of the flesh. They are called "mysterious things" (*nu badabada*), or "dead not embarked".

¹ *La Religion Bambara*, pp. 29, 146.

² J. Spieth, *Die Ewe-Stämme*, 1906, p. 565.

Sometimes the ghosts of bad men can be heard during the night, criminals, murderers, and practitioners of black magic, who dare not present themselves before God. They wail as they drag themselves along at the level of the ground. They cannot be seen, but if one crosses their path a pain or uneasiness is felt, shivering, headache, prickling skin or gooseflesh, or a sudden fall or stupor which shows that ghosts are about.

Those who have not been properly buried, such as fishermen who have been drowned at sea, hunters who have been lost in the chase, persons who have been struck by lightning or burnt alive in a fire, or men who have died of horrible diseases such as smallpox or leprosy, all become ghosts. They may be thought of as living in the "bad bush". (They are sometimes called *asisa*, like the Twi *sasa*.) The corpses, if found, are buried naked, and without any of the normal burial rites. But some months afterwards the family may be allowed mourning ceremonies, when the soul (*yɛ*) is thought to have been purified, and now become worthy to join its Creator.

The ghosts may, in some instances, be liberated from their wanderings by performing an imitation funeral ceremony in which the corpse is represented by a piece of wood. Three months after the death of the man who has become a ghost, the gravediggers go by night to the crossroads, with various offerings and a special jar. The ghost is called by a whistle, and pretence is made of capturing it and placing it in the jar. The sextons return to the house where the man died, and relatives bring many gifts of cloth; today this is becoming quite a profitable racket for impostors. After much coming and going, the jar is taken to the grave, where fowls are sacrificed and the jar is broken. The ghost is told now to go to the land of the ancestors, and to leave the living alone. Other rites may take place simply to send the ghost away from the living; they are called "softening" the ghost.¹

Not only frightening ghosts, but the spirits of other departed, may be seen or heard in the bush. A Gū-Ewe hunter told me that one evening he was watching in the bush, near the sea, for the time when the animals go to feed. About eleven at night he heard the voices of several persons far off towards the west, shouting and singing; in about a quarter of an hour they were only some fifteen paces away from him. Thinking that they were fishermen who had been throwing their nets into the sea, the hunter considered that it was no use waiting longer, for

¹ *La Géomancie*, pp. 378-393, 565; *Dahomey*, ii, p. 243.

the noise would have frightened the animals away and they would not come out again. When he moved from his place, suddenly all the noise ceased, and he saw nothing. Going to the beach he looked to see if they were in the water, but he could perceive nothing at all, and could not find even the slightest trace of footprints. He returned to his camp, where an old hunter friend was awaiting his return by the fire. Telling his adventures, he was informed by the old hunter that after eleven at night the spirits of the departed go to meet one who has just died. "Certainly somebody has died today or yesterday", he said. Next morning, on returning to their village, they learnt that a young man of sixteen had died in the neighbouring village.

Similar circumstantial stories are told of phantasms of the dying or recently dead. I heard from another man that he had sent away from his farm a workman called Agosu, younger brother of Dansu. Several days afterwards this farmer himself went to Porto Novo by bicycle, in a hurry for the night was coming on. On the road he overtook Dansu, the elder brother, walking slowly and limping on his left foot. The farmer saluted him first. "Dansu, why are you walking at that pace, do you not consider that it is dark?" The other replied, "I have a bad foot, but since there is a moon I can enter my village at any time I like". He begged the farmer to wait a minute, and the latter dismounted. "Listen, you are my cousin, do not be angry any more with my brother Agosu." The farmer answered that he was lazy, and having endured that for a long time he no longer wished to take him on. The other pleaded with him: "Have patience, he was not so lazy formerly, but recently his wife has divorced him and he has lost heart." "I understand, I will try him again", promised the farmer. "Good-bye, hurry up home." He jumped on his machine and sped on his way. The following week, the farmer returned to the village where the brothers lived and sent for Agosu. But he was told that Agosu's brother had died some time before, and that the funeral was being held. When the farmer went to the family to express his sympathy, Agosu told him that Dansu had suffered from a bad left foot, and had not stirred from his bed for two months. "How could he go out last week?" he asked, "He died a fortnight ago."

It is believed quite widely that apparitions of the departed may sometimes be met with in distant countries. The Ewe imagine this to take place especially in Nigeria, at the sacred

town of Ife. Living men are said to have met departed friends there, but when they spoke to them these ghosts either did not answer the salutation or disappeared. It is thought that these are ghosts without souls, who have died from witchcraft, or who were not really dead but had been entranced by witches, and after burial the witches had taken them out of the earth and had sold them as slaves in a distant country. Similar beliefs are held by the Yoruba, who think of the ghosts as living in the Gold Coast.

SOUTHERN NIGERIA

The Yoruba call the ghosts *iwîn* (a word used in some regions of divine spirits), or *oku*, "the dead". They have a particular fear of the children who are "born to die" (*abiku*). The birth of a stillborn child is a mystery. What happens to its soul? Some say that it returns to God, while others affirm that it stays with its mother. When a mother gives birth to two or more stillborn children in succession, it is thought to be the same child returning each time, and that perhaps it is a ghost or an evil spirit come to trouble men. It is a monster, like children who are born with some abnormality. A third stillborn child is called "there is no hoe" (i.e. to bury it with). Marks are made on the body of a stillborn child, so that it may be recognized if it returns. The mother wears special bracelets of sea-shells, and may spend much money on charms to prevent the return of the ghost.

Among the Ibo the Maw secret society has, as one of its chief functions, the duty of laying the soul of a deceased person. The soul is thought to wander until the "second burial", when a play is performed to speed it finally on its journey and prevent it from troubling the living as a ghost.

Departed spirits go to be judged by God, but if their deeds have been very evil he will banish them to an intermediate space of wandering between this world and the land of the dead. These ghosts (*ekwensu*) have thenceforth no fixed place of abode but are doomed, like Cain⁶, to wander for ever. Their life is restless and hopeless, for they can neither pass on to the abode of the just, nor yet be permitted to reincarnate into this world. These ghosts are vengeful and they endeavour to bring misfortune and death upon men; they may cause men to fall from the treetops, or steal away children; any accident may be attributed to their malicious works. They are said to be visible at times, and to visit graves where they dig up bones

and burn them. Anyone who comes across a ghost unexpectedly may die of shock.

The ghosts are evil men who, for some reason, have not received proper burial or funeral ceremonies; they may have been killed by wild beasts, died of dangerous diseases, or have been disinherited. They are thought to wander about especially at midnight or noonday. Unpunished murderers may cover a man's eyes, or urge him to wicked deeds. They try to kill their relatives, because they want them to go and live with them.

In some parts, those whose bodies have been thrown into the forest without due burial have offerings made to drive them away. These ghosts are believed to be particularly offensive to children, if such sacrifices are not made.¹

Among semi-Bantu tribes, the Efik grade the ghosts into two categories: those who were murderers, and those who are bound to the earth and haunt houses for something they have left behind; and those who did not receive burial but were thrown into the "bush of the dead". When ghosts are believed to haunt a house, a doctor is sought. He lights a palm torch and takes a brush with which he goes to every part of the house and compound to exorcize the ghosts, crying, "Go forth". The squeaks of the ghost can be heard, like a chicken, and it is chased outside the village. The ghosts are reputed to give off a very strong smell.

Many towns have offerings placed outside to keep the ghosts from entering into the dwellings. Other tribes of eastern Nigeria ask a doctor to apply medicine to the corpse of a man who has had to do with divinities, so that his spirit may be made "cold", free from dynamism, and not wander about to trouble others.²

NORTHERN NIGERIA

The Jukun have not a special word for ghost, but allusion has been made to their belief in *bwi*, a personified dynamism of men, certain animals, and big trees. If a murdered man possessed a strong *bwi*, this will pursue his enemy relentlessly. Hence one who has taken the head of an enemy or a thief tries to lay the *bwi* of the victim. Other people would avoid him, for fear of the *bwi* of the dead man. He would go to a special priest and live in a secluded hut for two or three days, being fumigated to drive off the ghost. Some think that a ghost cannot harm a murderer who has a stronger *bwi* than his victim.

¹ *Niger Ibos*, p. 286.

² *Peoples of Southern Nigeria*, pp. 311, 324.

Various animals also must have their ghost laid, whether they are killed accidentally or deliberately. Similarly with the larger trees; when a canoe is to be made out of a tree-trunk propitiatory rites are made to stop the ghost of the tree from pursuing the wood-cutter.

Some of the Jukun believe that various forest spirits are the ghosts of dead chiefs: they roam about with herds of animals and act as their leaders. The ghost may disclose his identity to a favoured hunter, appearing in the dress of a departed chief. The ghost asks the hunter what he desires most, and will give him charms so that his crops may grow more abundantly than those of other men, or so that he may kill more game, although the amount of game to be killed is thought to be limited by the favouring ghost, and if this is exceeded the hunter will die and become the slave of the ghost.

Other ghosts are those ancestors whose earthly relatives have all died, and who therefore have no one to give them food. These ghosts are thought only to appear to children, apparently to those who suffer from fits and other nervous complaints. The ghosts are held to offer food to the child, but later on to demand repayment in the form of the life of a relative of the child. This relative then falls ill, but if the child confesses that he has received food from a ghost the sick person will recover. The ghost is imagined to reside in a cave, and the child must take samples of the food he has named to the entrance of the cave. This is supposed to keep the ghost away for good, and to heal the sick relation. Thus these ghostly beliefs are a form of treatment for mental derangement.¹

Among other tribes of northern Nigeria, the Bachama considered that if a man was killed in war his spirit would wander, until brought home to his family hut. A doctor would be sent off to the bush, to find the ghost and bring it home. He would take a calabash of water and a stalk of grass, with which to attract the attention of the ghost. When he spotted the ghost he would call it, and invite it to enter the calabash so that it might be taken home to join its departed relatives. If the ghost did this, the doctor would hurry home and empty the calabash at the threshold of the burial hut of the family. A similar rite is performed in the Bornu, for recovering souls stolen by witches.

The Bura and Pabir think that a man killed by lightning was a harmful being; a certain clan dances round the corpse

¹ *A Sudanese Kingdom*, pp. 204, 292.

and the priest speaks to it, asking what evil it had done so that God had killed it. The body is supposed to reply that it had stolen or wished to steal souls, or had removed fertility from women. The corpse is buried where lightning has made a hole in the ground. Seven days later the ghost is destroyed by a special rite, in which a goat is tossed in the air and caught on staves. One of the clan pretends to espy the ghost, wraps it in grass, and puts it in the grave of the dead man.

The Jen, unlike their neighbours the Jukun, are not perturbed by the thought of pursuing ghosts. But they think that an enemy who is killed in warfare may seek to be reborn through the wife of his slayer. But if the slain man thought that his enemy was a bad man, he would not consent to rebirth through his wife, but would pursue the murderer and cause his strength to waste away.¹

The Anga believe that the soul of a bad man becomes a ghost (*kapwan*), and remains near to its mortal home to continue its evil machinations. It may steal children from their mother's satchel, appear as a white baby to shepherds and steal their sheep, or infect people with diseases so that they too may become ghosts. Some people are said to have the power of seeing these ghosts, and can beat them with whips, so that they run away with squeaks like mice. Dogs are thought to be able to see ghosts, and bark at them at night. The Yergum have similar ideas. The Dukawa believe wicked spirits to live isolated for two years without food or shelter; they are visible at night-time and have fire coming out of their armpits.²

The Kwotto believe that ghosts trouble men by their vengeful paternal spirit. A hunter or a murderer may be saturated with the maternal soul influence (*kofi*) of their victims. Hence a hunter will pray to the spirit of a dead lion, lest the force of the lion make him to die. It seems that in some cases the eating of part of the victim's body is believed to strengthen the hunter, that he is thereby freed from the vengeful attentions of his prey. The spirit will thenceforward leave the hunter, but remain in association with its skull, which may be used as a place of invocation for the assistance of the animal.³

The Muhammadan Hausa think that souls are good or bad, and that the latter are condemned to wander about perpetually.

¹ *Tribal Studies in Northern Nigeria*, i, pp. 44, 169.

² *Northern Tribes of Nigeria*, ii, p. 35.

³ *Red Men of Nigeria*, pp. 167-171.

The Muhammadan Tuareg, of the Sahara, abandon the body of a suicide without burial, and break their camp, never to return to that spot. As the Koran reproves suicide, they consider the self-murderer as if he had never existed, and forbid speaking of him. The ghost of the suicide is believed to wander about without finding rest. It likes to return to the place where it had died. People pretend to be able to hear such souls in the evening, and that one may make so much noise that it is impossible to sleep.¹

We may compare the idea of an avenging dynamism, with the belief of the Acholi of the Nilotic Sudan. This tribe thinks that if a man dies in anger or embitterment, a power called *cen* comes into being and turns against those with whom the deceased was angry, often making their children die. This power is associated with the corpse, for to get rid of it the bones are dug up, burnt at or near the grave, a sheep killed, and its intestines buried in place of the burnt bones.

The Nuer fear the spirit of a man who has been struck by lightning, or who dies suddenly at his work without previous illness, or who has vanished in a dust storm. It is thought that God has taken these spirits, and that if they are not immediately placated then their relatives and their cattle will be in great danger.²

Brief reference may be made to various types of ghosts believed in elsewhere. The Ba-ilà think that some people are "pressed" at or before death, and their ghosts taken by witches as slaves. They may escape or survive the witches, and act on their own. They are believed to cause disease, and sometimes to enter into people. They may waylay folk, and strike them dead. Sometimes they act like poltergeists, and knock burdens off people's heads, break axes, unhandle hoes, and so on. Another type of ghost is a "twitterer", who chirps and twitters like birds. These also are thought to have been "pressed" by witches, and to be in their service. They are thought to be very small, about eighteen inches high. Some people are held to have seen them, their bodies reversed, so that their faces and bellies are at the back, and their hair stands upright. They are held to live near to their master's hut, and his wife cooks plenty of food for them lest they beat her. They are sent out on errands to make people sick, to steal and to kill. Yet another type of ghost is the destructive demon of an aggrieved person,

¹ H. Lhote, *Les Touaregs du Hoggar*, 1944, p. 296.

² *Pagan Tribes of the Nilotic Sudan*, pp. 97, 237.

while another species is not thought of as malevolent, and is characterized by silence.¹

Capturing ghosts was practised by the Baganda, in a manner reminiscent of the ways of some Nigerians. The doctor would bring an empty vessel and some charms to the house. As the ghost was thought to be in the highest part of the hut, he would call it down or climb up after it, working in the dark and making sounds emerge from the roof. The ghost would be said to be placed in the pot, and then carried away outside the village to a waste patch where it was thrown, to be burnt by bush fires, or else thrown into a stream. Possessing ghosts would be exorcized by incantations, and inhalation of smoke from drugs. The saliva of persons taken by fits, under the influence of a possessing spirit, was avoided as it was considered to be infectious. Animal ghosts were feared, and shrines built to avoid their pursuit.²

Junod says of the Bantu that man, and a number of the larger animals, possesses a semi-spiritual principle (*nuru*) which avenges those who are killed in war, by murder, or in the hunt. It is difficult to say what is the relationship between this avenging principle and the soul of the deceased, but it seems to be more material than the soul, for it is attached to the corpse and the bones of its owner. Junod calls this a compromise between animism and dynamism. It would seem to be a force of man and animals, but not identical with the integral personality in the sense that Europeans might understand such a ghostly influence. Dynamistic concepts are the key to understanding the ghostly forces of the departed.³

¹ *Ila-speaking Peoples*, ii, pp. 132-133.

² *The Baganda*, pp. 286-289.

³ *Moeurs et Coutumes des Bantous*, ii, pp. 322-323.

AFTER-LIFE AND JUDGMENT

AFTER death, the soul of the righteous is generally thought to reside in a world beyond the grave, for varying lengths of time. This world beyond is sometimes believed to be situated above the sky, but more often it is considered to be under the ground. The two notions may co-exist in the same tribe. The subterranean world would appear to be the more ancient belief, while the skyey heaven may partly be due to Islamic contacts and, more recently, to Christian teaching.¹

Popular ideas of the after-life have much in common with those of the predynastic Egyptians; the "fields of peace" appear to have been under the ground, where the dead continued similar occupations to those in which they were engaged upon earth: ploughing, reaping, fishing. Work was thought to be lighter and pleasure more abundant than in mortal life, and some privileged souls were set apart for reserved occupations.

West African peoples commonly think that men continue their terrestrial work, interspersed with pleasures of earthly type. The world beyond is composed of towns and villages as on earth, with each tribe dwelling in its own place; to this clan a man must find his way, even if he dies far from his homeland. The classes of society are said, by many, to be maintained as on earth, chiefs and slaves occupying the same grades, hence the importance attached to maintaining the retinue of the chief in the old human "sacrifices". One does meet, however, with more democratic and levelling beliefs, or a reversal of class and even of colour in the beyond. Many believe that water, a river or the sea, must be crossed to gain the underworld, as the ancients crossed the Styx.

The notions of judgment and rewards vary in different tribes. In some places, where these thoughts are developed, it is held that God may degrade evil chiefs, and exalt the righteous poor, but some deny the possibility of change of rank, colour or sex. There is no orthodox doctrine.

¹ The Egyptians thought that kings went to the sky, while other departed spirits went underground. See W. J. Perry, *The Growth of Civilization*, Chap. IX.

LOWER GOLD COAST AND IVORY COAST

Some of the Ashanti seem to think of the world to come as situated in the heavens, for they believe that to reach the land of spirits the soul has to climb a steep hill, as is shown by the gasps of dying men, and the water that is poured down their throats to help them in the ascent.

On the other hand, the world beyond is thought of as a place of cold and dark, and no one has any inclination to go there before his time. This earth is not regarded as a "vale of tears" or a "desert drear". With all its trials, this world is warm and sun-bathed; whereas the beyond is thought of as cold and dark. Therefore the beyond is so often thought to be subterranean, and corresponding to this is the myth that men and women first appeared from the underground regions, coming out from thence on to the surface of the earth. Even with the best fortune in the after-world, the highest possible reward is to be allowed to return to this earth in a well-arranged reincarnation, in the same blood and totem clan.

A dead man receives food and clothing and money for his journey to the beyond, so that he may pass through all the trials of the way, and arrive honourably in the presence of his ancestors. If these gifts were neglected, the dead one might become a homeless and hungry ghost.

In the future world the deceased one still depends on his family for sustenance, in the form of the offerings which are made at regular intervals: the *adae* ceremonies that play such a large part in Ashanti religion. The kings of Ashanti not only had wives who were strangled to accompany them, during the funeral ceremonies, but there were other "spirit-wives" who were later chosen to minister to the needs of the kings, now regarded as their deceased husbands. These women brought food to the grave; they observed all the dead king's tabus; when the weekly time of "washing" the soul arrived they shaved their heads and dressed in white, to sit beside the bones of the king. No one could speak to these wives; they must always be chaste, and when one died another wife replaced her. A similar institution existed for the kings of Abomey.¹

The Gã think that the dead wander about near to their earthly homes until forty days after their decease, i.e. until all the flesh on the skull has decayed. Then the spirits are believed to cross a river, and arrive at a place where their noses are

¹ *Religion and Art in Ashanti*, pp. 118, 154.

broken; wherefore dead spirits speak in nasal tones (as do some of those evoked by mediums, and some of the masqueraders in secret societies which represent the dead). After three days in this land, the dead may return to their homes, sometimes in the form of bats.

There is a vague belief in judgment, whereby the good and evil meet with due reward but, as on earth, the course of justice may be swayed by appropriate gifts, and some of the penalties may be diminished if suitable offerings are made.¹

The Agni believe that the souls of the dead go to a place called Eboro. It is the personality-soul (*wawe*), which resembles the body in all ways, and when liberated from it sets off at once for Eboro, living there in an existence similar to that of the earth. The spirit of man (*ehomme*) stays for some time on earth, and is said to appear at times to friends and relatives. It stays around until the final funeral rites are accomplished.²

The lacustrine Adjukru believe that departed spirits go away to the sea, to reach the abode of the dead, the "village of the dead" (*nyen-esu-bayn*). However, some say that the land of the departed is in the heavens. Those who are drowned at sea are thought to remain always cold, and they come at times to ask for fire from the lagoon dwellers. There is but a vague notion of judgment after death. All souls are equal, and must continue to live after death, but God kills very evil souls. Sudden death, accidents, and death by lightning are said to be punishments sent by God upon the wicked still upon this earth. These latter beliefs are still held by the many members of this tribe who have embraced Christianity, but their ideas of the hereafter are much more precise and Biblical.

The Bete believe that the personality-soul stays near the dead man till four days after death, and then sets out for the great village of the dead. This village is believed to be situated at a great distance from the earthly residence of the tribe and to be under the ground. Its name (*ku-duho*) recalls Yoruba and Jukun roots for the dead; the Ewe word for the town of the dead is *ku-tome*.³

The Baoule, of the central Ivory Coast, believe in a supreme God, Nyamye, who is evidently akin to the Ashanti Onyame. It is he who presides at the judgment of souls after death, rewarding the good and punishing the evil. The Gagou have

¹ *Religion and Medicine of the Gã*, p. 203.

² *Assinie et le royaume de Krinjabo*, p. 203.

³ *Moeurs et Coutumes des Bété*, p. 70.

similar beliefs concerning their god Nyamien. The dead go off to a distant village, where they lead a life similar to that of the earth.¹

UPPER GOLD COAST, UPPER IVORY COAST, SUDAN

Both northern Akan and Mossi believe in these villages of the dead. The Mossi think that it is situated in a sacred hill. From time to time it is believed that the sound of drumming comes out of the sides of this hill, and this is a presage of some great calamity coming upon the tribe, such as the death of their king. Nobody will go near this hill, but all endeavour to avoid it because of the supposed presence there of the spirits of the dead, who might catch hold of the trespasser, so that he would never get back to his home again. There are supposed to be mysterious paths in the bush, which appear to lead nowhere. These are spirit roads. One is said to run through a town right to the Mossi hill of the dead; men never walk along it, yet it seems to be well trodden by the spirits. These may be animal bush tracks.²

The northern tribes think that the departed go to the south, to Kumasi or Salaga, which were strange and distant places to them in times past, when communications were poor through lack of roads and frequency of tribal warfare. The Fanti, on the coast, think that the dead go to the north of the Volta, and that there they build villages, which some men are supposed to have visited, while some of the people in the central regions consider that the dead spirits go away to the east. Ife in Nigeria, the sacred town and traditional cradle of the Yoruba people, is a favourite resort for the departed and they may be seen there, so it is avowed by people of other lands.

The views of the Bambara upon the after-life appear in several strata. The most ancient thought seems to have been that of the metamorphosis of departed spirits into totem animals. Another old idea is that the dead go underground, but there is also the belief that they can visit the earth and their old homes.

But today the Bambara, like some of the Mossi and many tribes of the northern territories who have come into contact with Islam, believe in Lahara or Lahira. This is one of those ubiquitous Arabic words which, like the seven-day week, has penetrated far beyond the areas of direct conversion to Islam in West Africa. It has helped to crystallize ideas of the here-

¹ *Nègres Gouro et Gagou*, pp. 140, 255.

² *Tales told in Togoland*, pp. 33-35.

after which these tribes perhaps vaguely felt after, but had not precisely defined.

The Bambara today believe that Lahara is in the east, towards the rising sun and Mecca. It is the town of the departed ancestors, to which the spirit goes after death. Children only pass through it, and hasten to return to this earth to complete their allotted span. Older people may stay longer in Lahara and not hasten to reappear on earth, awaiting a favourable opportunity of coming into their own family, or refusing it and being born elsewhere if they are dissatisfied.

In the world of the dead the Bambara think that men eat, drink and labour as on earth, a somewhat idealized existence with less suffering than here below. It is sometimes said that light and heat are in short supply in the hereafter. The weak live in neglect and poverty; the rich, powerful, and seers, are actively and passionately interested in the concerns of their earthly families, hovering about among them while remaining invisible. All can show themselves to men, particularly at places where there are ample offerings. All the dead are superior to mortals, and have some power over wind and rain, agriculture and game. To relatives who neglect them the dead appear as frightening ghosts.

It seems that originally there was but a faint Bambara belief in rewards and punishments in the hereafter, but today a good number of them believe in a hell, where the spirits of the utterly recalcitrant are tormented and cannot return to earth. This is the lot of the few, and they do not live in terror of hell fire. This is almost certainly a Muhammadan importation, as for thirty years during the nineteenth century the Bambara were ruled by the fanatically Muhammadan Toucouleur tribe who tried by force, but without full or lasting success, to suppress all pagan worship and belief. They did succeed in introducing some of their own beliefs into the more tolerant pagan eschatology.¹

Some of the Islamized tribes, such as the Fulani (Peuls) of the northern regions and Sudan, believe in a paradise (*ardiana*) which is the reward of the righteous, and a hell (*dianam*) where the wicked go to burn after death. Neutral people, those who are not too good or too bad, go to a purgatory (*larafo*) whence they may proceed to paradise later if their conduct merits such promotion.²

¹ *La Religion Bambara*, pp. 110-112; *Djénne*, pp. 132-133.

² *Le Noir du Yatenga*, pp. 651 ff.

AFTER-LIFE AND JUDGMENT

TOGO AND DAHOMEY

The Ewe peoples believe that the beyond is organized like this world, with divisions into villages and wards as on earth. Each tribe has its place, and Muhammadans have their abode, like the *zongo* in which they live attached to so many West African villages.

The Togolese call the underworld "Abode of the Dead", or "Place of Departed Spirits". It is a great house to which all journey, and to help him on his voyage the dead man has travelling money placed in his grave, together with tobacco, snuff, and cowries. Some believe that every man has a spirit-mother in the beyond, who both sends children into this world and receives men back again after death; so on dying the soul returns home to its spiritual mother; but this mother is subject to God who directs all souls.

The Ewe think that to return to the spirit-world the soul must cross the sea, or a broad stream, wherefore corpses are laid on the left side—they are left-handed—with their heads facing the sea. There are stories of ferrymen to be passed, to whom the spirit has to give some of the money or tobacco which has been buried with him. Some tell of a high mountain to be climbed and of guardians barring the route, and imposing tests on newcomers. Much of the success of the spirit is thought to depend on the fidelity with which its surviving relatives carry out the funeral rites.

When the spirit arrives in the village of the dead it is welcomed by the ancestors, who ask for news of earth and take gifts from the new arrival. If he has nothing in his hand he is ashamed to appear before his fathers, just as on earth he would not appear before a chief empty-handed.

The dead soul will seek out the soul of its wife, and a wife will search for her husband. Some say that a man's true wife is his first, or the wife or wives of whom he had the virginity. Men are thought to die more easily than women, but widows feel their husband's spirit calling them. If a family were to die out, its dead soul would be sent elsewhere by God, but this is very rare for there are usually some distant or unknown relatives.

The Ewe have a distinct idea of judgment, and of a god Ajaguna who leads the spirits of the dead to the supreme God. The soul must tell God of all its deeds upon earth. If there is a preponderance of good actions over evil, then God will assign a

good place to this spirit in the beyond, and will soon send it back again to be reborn in its own family. But if it has been a very bad man, God may condemn it to extinction, to nothingness (*ye-ivv*, soul-go-end). This soul will die out, with all its associated powers, but not its guardian spirit. A family which gets worried as to the lot of an ancestor, and from whom it can get no answer to communications through the Fa oracle, may be informed that the spirit of the relative had been annihilated.

The souls that are not so bad as to merit destruction may be retained by God in the beyond; their punishment will be to stay with God, who is said to recompense them severely. God may also forbid souls to join him; such are the ghosts who are doomed to wander homeless and miserable on the earth. Others may be sent to a mysterious place of penalties, a very strict prison. At the occasional rites for the dead, there are extra sacrifices made for the souls in agony. The notions of these punishments are vague and confused; there has undoubtedly been some Christian influence, especially noticeable in people who live in the coastal towns.

I have been informed that the Gū-Ewe believe that the judgment comes immediately after death. The judges are the ancestors of each family, who have the power of condemning and punishing the evildoers of their respective families. The dying sinner is put upon pointed nutshells while awaiting the day fixed for the judgment. Some are punished by having to crawl about on hands and knees, while others spend long periods kneeling. Even kings and chiefs may be so punished, if their lives have been evil.

In the beyond no earthly troubles worry the soul, and this freedom is a distinguishing mark of the dead. Before its return to earth, God may reveal to it some of its future lot, but not what is to happen to other souls. There are varied opinions as to the time spent between incarnations; some put the minimum period spent in the beyond as two months, perhaps the interval before conception is noticed in a woman, others put the time at three years. Some affirm that the dead come to earth sixteen times (possibly an influence from the sixteen figures and deities of the Ifa oracle), and that then the souls of the dead go to live in trees. For this reason women who desire children go to pray near trees.

Christian influence, or Muhammadan (less probably in this area, where there are few Muslims), may be traced in the assertion of some nowadays that the after-world is in the sky. To

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those who affirm that the village of the dead is underground, these modernists reply that when one digs in the ground one only finds bones and rocks, but no soul or underworld.

It is believed that a few rarely fortunate men have visited the after-world, and some claim still to be able to do so. These visits seem to have their origin in dreams, in which the dreamer has seen his deceased parent in a strange village; and in the "manifest content" many details would be added to the dream from traditional notions of the after-life. Diviners claim to be able to get into touch with the departed, particularly those who either go into a trance themselves, or who hypnotize someone else.¹

SOUTHERN NIGERIA

There are more signs of Muhammadan influence among the Yoruba; and today Islam is making rapid strides into this tribe and affecting its theology. Christianity also has become an important factor among them. The Yoruba believe in a heaven above, a "sky of cool breeze", or "centre of the sky". This is the final destination of the good, after they have passed before God for judgment. There is a different destination for the wicked, who are condemned to a "sky of potsherds", the bad sky. This is a celestial rubbish-heap, like the midden-heap of every village, where broken pots are thrown when the "spirit" has gone out of them; or it may be compared to a kiln, where there are charred fragments of pots, hot and very dry. There are even said to be several hells, each worse than the other.²

There are also traces of what appears to be a more ancient belief in an after-world under the ground. It is from the ground that the Egūgū impersonators of the dead often emerge. The departed are thought to continue to exist underground: there earthly ranks are retained, except for the wicked who are punished and may be degraded in rank.

The personal soul of the departed is held responsible for its misdeeds, and is rewarded or punished accordingly. This punishment may be alleviated if the survivors of the deceased make supererogatory offerings, by sacrificing fowls to buy the road for the departed, and allow him to secure a passage to the more agreeable heaven.

The Edo of Benin have a similar belief in a "sky of old shells",

¹ *La Géomancie*, pp. 379-403; *Dahomey*, ii, pp. 233-241.

² *Faith, Fancies and Fetich*, p. 133.

where an erstwhile god reigns. But there is a higher place for the noble and rich ruled by the chief God. Talbot suggests that the idea of a heaven above may have been introduced by the Roman Catholic missionaries, who worked in Benin for over a century and a half, from 1515. But the after-life is not thought of as preferable to life on earth, and the fact that people are believed to return quickly from the beyond suggests that they do not find it particularly enviable. Indeed, a punishment for evil-doing is to stay long in the beyond, while reward for good living is speedy return to earth. The sojourn in heaven is partly disciplinary, and when a man wants to return to earth he has to ask God, who permits it if the time is suitable. Here the after-world is thought of as divided into wards, as on earth, trades such as blacksmiths and goldsmiths living apart as they do on earth.¹

The Ijaw of the Niger delta think of the dead as near to or under the ground, although there are also tales of them living in the sky. It is related that the deceased has to cross a river, where is an old ferry-woman, who demands the money that was buried with the corpse. Memorials of the dead often contain miniature boats, like that which is supposed to ferry the dead over the waters, and which bear some resemblance to the funeral boats which were put in ancient Egyptian graves.²

The Ibo believe that the spirit goes underground at death, but that the separation is only temporary. A dead man is said to have "gone home", or "gone to the land of spirits". This is not said of a child, whose destiny is uncertain owing to its premature decease. When a man dies all his spirit relatives are thought to crowd round him, to welcome him to the land of spirits. The Owner of the land of spirits is said to send his messenger Death to call the dying man; Death appears as a skeleton, carrying a staff with which he hits the man at the base of his skull. Rebirth depends upon the good behaviour of the deceased; if the master of the beyond is angered by his conduct he may be banished to an intermediate state between the spirit world and the earth, there to wander. Henceforward, like Sciron, he is rejected by both earth and heaven, a lost soul.

Some of the initiation rites performed for youths have clear connexions with belief in the after-world. The youths are told that in sleep they are taken down to the underworld, and that to arrive at the house of the spirits they must get through the

¹ *Peoples of Southern Nigeria*, ii, pp. 267-270.

² *Ibid.*

hole of a tiny insect, after which they must cross a wide river balancing on a mere thread. A guiding spirit is said to direct them during their sleep. It would not be difficult to trace here maternal symbols, suggesting a return to the womb before rebirth.¹

The Ibibio believe in a land of the dead, either under the earth or on the earth, where men stay for a year or two until reincarnation. A fence separates this other world from the mortal plane, and to it the soul makes a long journey. It finds awaiting it those who have been killed to serve as retinue. The new arrival has to knock at the door, and cannot enter until permission is given by the supreme God Abassi. Abassi is surrounded by great men and asks what gifts the newcomer has brought with him from earth. If he has brought many animals and cloths, then he is welcome to a place of honour. But a poor man is sent out to the place of the poor and unimportant. Therefore families will ruin themselves in order to provide a sumptuous funeral for their departed relative, so that he may arrive in the beyond with many goods.²

Other semi-Bantu tribes of Nigeria think of the dead as living under the ground, or under the water, in villages as on earth, with rich and poor together. The dead are believed to be able to come among men, and to be visible to clairvoyants. Some think of them as changing into animal shape until their reincarnation; evil men are thought to inhabit snakes or to appear in such form. Some believe that dead black people may be reborn as whites, and Europeans as blacks.³

The Tiv, of eastern Nigeria, believe that departed spirits go to the sky, where they are judged, and the good are separated from the bad by Takuruku, brother of God and the first human ancestor. The good souls are passed on to God (Aondo), and go to dwell in a celestial town. The evil are kept in a separated place, and relegated to a "bad bush". Some say that there is a heaven above for the great, while lesser souls go under the earth. The dead are also thought to haunt groves and streams, and to be present there in a community. There is also belief in the appearance of the departed in animal form, especially at night.⁴

¹ *Niger Ibos*, pp. 282-286, 372.

² *Life in Southern Nigeria*, pp. 140-141.

³ *Peoples of Southern Nigeria*, ii, pp. 270-273.

⁴ R. C. Abraham, *The Tiv People*, pp. 23 ff.; R. M. Downes, *The Tiv Tribe*, 1933, p. 54.

NORTHERN NIGERIA

The Jukun think that on death a man's soul goes to a subterranean region (*kindo*), the name of which means "home of the dead". This underworld is like the earth; with houses and fields, and a hierarchy of chiefs and commoners as in the world above. There is a god (Ama) in charge of this realm, who allots to every newly-arrived spirit the place due to its rank and according to its deeds. Some say that the spirit first searches for its father, grandfather, and other deceased seniors, who escort it to the founder of the dynasty, settling disputes and showing to each spirit the cause of its death. But others say that while there are kings in the beyond who rule over their earthly subjects, theirs is a restricted monarchy, and Ama is supreme Judge of the departed. If a man is killed before his allotted time, by murder or witchcraft, Ama may declare that he had not deserved this premature death, and then the relatives of the spirit will urge it to return to earth as a ghost and kill its murderer; when both spirits finally appear again before Ama he will judge the quarrel of the two on its merits.

Ama is thus the judge, and righteousness reigns in the beyond. The underworld is called "the house of truth", because there truth is spoken (as in the Egyptian judgment). Evil-doers are punished in the beyond, even if they have escaped the consequences of their sins while on earth. Very evil men are said to be sent to the "land of red earth", a sort of second death, where they are lost forever and have no chance of rebirth. Murderers and witches are the chief offenders for whom this fate is reserved, and those who have killed men by black magic and lingering sicknesses. There is a kind of purgatory for those whose crimes are not so great; they are driven away from their earthly parents, and made to wander homeless and foodless. But after a time of purgation they may be permitted to be born again on to the earth.

In the beyond there is no sickness, and all tears are wiped away. By prayer to Ama it is thought that a man can secure a higher grade in rebirth than the rank which he previously occupied. Men carry on their earthly occupations in the beyond, and priests continue their work by keeping in touch with priests on earth; by this contact the living priest claims to be able to obtain the help of the ancestors for those who patronize his cult. There is no marrying or giving in marriage in the beyond. As with the Ewe, there is a Jukun belief that a man

has the wife whom he had as a virgin, and any other wives of whom he had the virginity. Monogamy is the rule in the beyond, unless a man had several virgin girls on earth. When a woman dies she searches for the husband that she had first, and may not have any dealings with later husbands whose company she may have enjoyed on earth; if she dies before her first husband she awaits his arrival at the home of her relations. There are said to be no children procreated in the beyond.

The dead are thought to have no teeth, for all the food they have there is red worms. Their food needs supplementing with the offerings of their survivors. The dead have no clothes beside those that were buried with them. The underworld is cold and their clothing needs renewal, so that at the annual feast for the departed gowns and cloths are given by their relatives to the officiants. These are sold, but the inner essence of the cloth is supposed to be taken by the departed spirits. The dead are more numerous and wise than men; they know all that goes on in the world, and they are always near to their terrestrial relations.¹

Other tribes of northern Nigeria have less precise notions of the after-life. The Bachama call the abode of the dead the "red country", a term also used by the Hausa for the dwelling of spirits (*bori*). No living person has seen this red land, and anyone would disappear who entered it. Life in the red land is like that on earth, except that men rest from their labours. There is some idea of retribution, for the spirits of evil men are said to be tied up and beaten by their fellows, at the orders of the principal spirits.

The Margi, like the Jukun, believe that a man's wife in the world to come will be the one that he had as a virgin here on earth. There can be no other marriages in the beyond and no wife-stealing; however undesirable his first wife may have turned out on earth, the spirit will have to retain her for the whole of his stay in the after-world.

The Jibu also call the beyond the "house of truth", and on the sixth day of the performance of the rites of Aku, the ancestral spirits, the headman goes to the grave and tells the deceased that he has gone to the House of Truth, and that the hole by which he came out to join the Aku is now blocked up. A symbol of a pot is made for the deceased, and offerings are made there. If the pot becomes broken these sacrifices cease, as it is thought that the departed has left the underworld and been reborn on the earth.

¹ *A Sudanese Kingdom*, pp. 198, 208-211.

Some tribes, like the Katab, adopt the Muhammadan term Lahira for the abode of the dead, as do the Bambara. Most of the departed spirits are assigned to Lahira, and this tribe thinks that the ones who return to the world to trouble men are the discontented and evil spirits. Those who have done evil are punished in Lahira by the spirits of the ancestors. A man's first wife is thought to be his real wife; when a widow dies she goes to find the spirit of her first husband, and similarly a widower will seek out the spirit of his maiden wife.

Other tribes do not concern themselves much with the thought of life after death, says Dr. Meek, and have no active belief in judgment like the Jukun. The Gabin, of Adamawa province, believe chiefly in the continuing activity of the departed in the form of ghostly apparitions. The Roba and northern Yungur seem to have given little thought to the subject of eschatology, and merely state that a man who dies goes east, whence many tribes think their first parents originated.¹

Allusion has been made previously to the belief of the Nigerian Kagoro, that when a man is ill his spirit goes to the river of death, and is considered by the spirits of the departed. If they think that the sick man's due time has come, he is permitted to go to them over a bridge. But if they decide that it is not yet time that he died, they drive the soul back to the body, and the man recovers from his illness. Sometimes there is a delay, the spirits not being unanimous in their decision and so deferring it; if eventually they decide to let the man continue living on earth he will recover, but with a partial paralysis of his limbs or his brain. The detention or return of the soul is thought to depend entirely upon the judgment of the dead souls, and since they are inflexible no offerings, says Tremearne, are made by earthly relatives of the sick man to induce the spirits to come to a favourable decision.

Some of the Kagoro say that evil-doers who have not fully expiated their misdeeds upon earth, will be punished to the full in the hereafter. But the general opinion seems to be that a powerful man on earth will be strong in the world to come, retaining much of his vital force. The offering of beer atones for crimes; there is no hell.

The departed spirits live like mortals, riding, hunting, eating, and always ready for a drink of beer. There are no houses, and the departed live in a sacred grove. The spirits have the use of horses and dogs, though some would say that animals have no

¹ *Tribal Studies in Northern Nigeria*, i, pp. 45, 224; ii, pp. 62, 514.

souls. Animals can perceive these departed spirits, whereas men cannot do so unless they are seers.

A man will have as wife in the beyond the woman who was his first wife upon earth. If he has died first his spirit will come to fetch her when she is at her dying breath, or she will come to find him if she predeceased him. Children come to find their parents, and parents meet their unmarried children.¹

In the folklore of the Muhammadan Hausa the next world appears as a replica of this one. Families are reunited, live in houses, and have similar cares as in this world. Heaven appears to be above, although there is a heavenly night and day. But in one story the "People of the Next World" (*mutanea Lahira*) are spoken of as living at the bottom of a well, and any mortal who happens to fall into this well has to give presents of clothes to the departed, before they allow him to leave. In another story, the House of Death (*mutua*) is like the house of a witch, and there seems to be some connexion between the two in the popular mind. A mortal who manages to visit the after-world may eat the food that he finds there, which is not thought to be so deadly as some other tribes consider it to be; nevertheless this food is believed to be dangerous, and a visitor may refuse to partake of it. In some stories the mortal visitor is saved from disaster in the beyond by his intelligent horse; in others the spider, that popular wise creature of West African folklore, saves him.²

The vagueness and contradictions of many of these beliefs in the after-life indicate the presence of several strata of belief, and also the lack of deep and sustained thought upon these subjects.

Other African tribes exhibit similar diversity of belief. Some of the Bantu say that the dead go to a subterranean village, where all is white; they live a life similar to that of the earth, ploughing, reaping, living in abundance and distributing some of it to their survivors on earth. The Ba-rotse on the Zambezi say that the dead go to the god of the sky, Nyambe; the departed have to cross a great river, and they are examined to see if they have the marks made on corpses to indicate that they belong to Nyambe. But the Tchopi say that their ancestors live in the rivers, they do not fear tombs and even cultivate the soil above them, declaring that only bones remain there and that the spirits have gone away to the rivers.³

Willoughby has noted both "belief in an underworld of the

¹ *Tailed Head-Hunters of Nigeria*, pp. 170-172.

² *Hausa Superstitions and Customs*, pp. 118, 157-160.

³ *Moeurs et Coutumes des Bantous*, ii, p. 331.

dead", and also that "some Bantu legends point to a world in the sky"; and again that some Bantu tribes consider that "the underworld is in the West—still under, but west". There are stories of sky-people, or "cloud-folk", and phrases that suggest either ascent to heaven or departure to a western underworld.¹

The Ba-ila and Bambala think of the beyond as deep down below the ground. Life there is much the same as on earth; hunters and fishermen continue their avocations, and marrying and giving in marriage continue. Some say that the beyond is away to the east, and a corpse is placed with its head to the west but bent down, looking towards the rising sun whither the spirit is believed to go. Here again a tradition recounts that the ancestors came from the east.²

The Lamba of Rhodesia believe that the place of the dead is in the west. Sometimes it is said to be underground. It is a large country, ruled over by a king, who is not an ancestor, and who is subject to the supreme God. As only human beings have a "soul" or "person", there are no animals in this underworld. All races are to be found there, and all speak the same language, which they acquire at once on arrival. All men are equal, there being no longer great and small. There is no sex, all being males in their prime. There are no houses or grass. The ground is soft, and the inhabitants spend their time in rest and conversation. Each man has a new body, which is still recognizable. One would suspect Christian or extraneous influence in these thoughts, some of which appear strange to Africa.³

Death gives place to life. The West African peoples, in particular, look forward to reincarnation after a brief passage through the world beyond. The psychologist would say that the journey across the river of death is one of the symbols for return to the mother and rebirth. "All that is living rises as does the sun, from the water, and at evening plunges into the water. Born from the springs, the rivers, the seas, at death man arrives at the waters of the Styx in order to enter upon the 'night journey on the sea'. The wish is that the black water of death might be the water of life; that death, with its cold embrace might be the mother's womb, just as the sea devours the sun, but brings it forth again out of the maternal womb (Jonah motive). Life believes not in death. . . . The sea is the symbol of birth."⁴

¹ *The Soul of the Bantu*, pp. 60-68. ² *Ila-speaking Peoples*, ii, pp. 119-123.

³ *Lambas of Northern Rhodesia*, pp. 231-232.

⁴ G. C. Jung, *Psychology of the Unconscious*, E.T., 1933, p. 135.

CHAPTER 10

REINCARNATION

"REINCARNATION is the passage of the soul from one body to another, usually of the same species, among higher races of men often with ethical implications, the lot of the soul on earth being determined by its behaviour in a former life. Transmigration, metempsychosis, and other terms are often used in an almost identical sense, but also in a vaguer way, implying at times that the soul itself assumes an animal form, sometimes permanently, sometimes only as a prelude to another reincarnation or to final destruction or absorption. . . . Separate existence, reincarnation, annihilation, and transmigration are the possibilities that present themselves to the primitive mind when it inquires into the fate of the soul. We cannot say why one belief rather than another has been adopted in any specific instance; but it is clear that the resemblance of children to parents (and other relatives) has played some part, especially in West Africa."¹

Reincarnation is firmly believed in by most of the West African peoples. Many of the assumptions of oriental thought are lacking, however, and it is well to point out some of these assumptions, so that one may be warned against importing them into interpretation of West African thought without sufficient evidence.

India is the classic home of the belief in reincarnation, and this thought underlies not only Hinduism, but also Jainism and Buddhism. Yet in the ancient days of the Vedas there seems to have been no trace of the belief. In those times men enjoyed life on earth, and appear to have anticipated blessed and eternal life for the righteous after death. One of the main factors in the development of the theory of reincarnation seems to have been the dismay caused when man began to meditate upon the constant recurrence of death; though the theory itself may have been ultimately due to extraneous influence. Eventually, the notion of a round of existence, in which all beings are involved, gripped the Indian mind. Little escape was seen to be possible from this cycle of existence; even the gods must descend again to lower forms when they have exhausted their former merit. Release from the round of existence was sought

¹ *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, xii, pp. 425-435.

through works of piety and extremes of asceticism, but it was chiefly held that this release from rebirth could come only through knowledge. Knowledge alone could consume "the seed of works", and render future incarnations impossible. This was only attainable by a select few.

In theory, Buddhism does not teach the existence of a soul, and therefore not its reincarnation, but speaks of a stream of existences. This stream is an indefinite revolution of existences, renewed according to the quality of the karma. But, in practice, the popular Mahayanist conception is that of reincarnation very much on the Hindu pattern; and the moral influence of both theories is one of retribution and redemption, the actions of one life determining those of the next.

In view of the wide distribution of the belief in reincarnation in Africa, it is strange that there has been found little trace of it among the remains of the ancient Egyptians. This ~~is~~ fact that must be borne in mind when considering the possible influence of Egypt on African religion. "The question of transmigration has been disputed. The Greek authors refer to it as an undoubted belief; but there seems to be no Egyptian text which refers to the idea."¹ It is only after the Persian period that clear evidence of the belief appears. The belief became very common in later times, and it may have been current much earlier than we can tell from the texts that are available.

Even the Jews, although they did not believe in successive existences, came to hold that the soul pre-existed its mortal life, and that it had celestial experiences before descending to earth. "All the fancies and legends clustering round the pre-natal embryo are intended to stress the idea that the soul, a divine spark, is pre-existent, that life on this planet is only a vestibule leading to the world to be. . . . Every child in its pre-natal existence has thus been in the company of angels and dwellers in Paradise, but it has only a vague remembrance of any of this life which it experiences before it sees the light of day."²

In considering West African ideas, it will make for clarity to confine ourselves to the use of the words reincarnation or rebirth, to denote the appearance of a person again upon the earth in a human body. We shall avoid the words transmigration or metempsychosis, which might be taken to denote

¹ *E.R.E.*, *loc. cit.*, p. 431.

² A. S. Rappoport, *The Folklore of the Jews*, 1937, pp. 91 ff.

birth in either human or animal form. The belief in change into animal bodies will be dealt with in the next chapter, under the title of metamorphosis.

LOWER GOLD COAST AND IVORY COAST

The Akan peoples are well acquainted with the idea of reincarnation. As has been seen, the personal or blood-soul, which gives men their bodily shape, is held to go at death to the spirit-world and there to await reincarnation through a woman of the same clan. This is the principal means by which it is thought man can be reborn. But the totemic male element would also seek reincarnation, quite independently of the blood-soul, and be reborn through a male of the same totem.

The importance of names given to children is due to this belief in reincarnation. Marriages with the children of the maternal uncle were encouraged "to get back great names", because "if my niece bears a son, I can name him after myself or my ancestors". "Pure incarnations", or "pure souls" are incarnations of those who are of the same blood and totem. An uncle would compel his niece to marry his son so that not only his blood would reincarnate, as it would in any case, but so that her child by his son would inherit the same totemic spirit, and this alone would permit the child to be named after its great-uncle or some ancestor.

Ancestors and grandparents are called "Nana": this word is also sometimes used for grandchild, but here the child is thought to be the reincarnation of its grandparents, and in so addressing it men are recognizing that rebirth.

When a child is born it is thought to come from the land of spirits, and that there is a spirit-mother in that land who laments the loss of her child. Hence for some days after birth the child is watched with uncertainty, for no one can tell whether its spirit-parent will recall it. Indeed it may, by dying, seem to prove that it was not a human child, but some wandering spirit. After the eighth day it is assumed, from the child's survival, that it really is more than a spirit-child, and is a real person.¹

The Gã think that the spirit (*kla*) is the part of man to be reincarnated, says Dr. Field. On death the spirit becomes an invisible spirit (*sisá*), but when reincarnation takes place the spirit of the deceased is held still to need offerings. This seems a strange contradiction to the European mind, perhaps because

¹ *Religion and Art in Ashanti*, pp. 59, 317-323.

we take these beliefs too literally, and think of the soul as one and indivisible. It seems that the Gã believe that there is a constant amount of spirit in circulation, but that the company of the ancestors is continually increasing. The spirit animating men and reincarnating may be a force which energizes the world, and which is not wholly withdrawn when a man passes to the world beyond.

Reincarnation is not thought by the Gã always to take place in the male line, although this is assumed unless there are signs to the contrary. A grandfather may be alive at the same time as his grandson, and several grandsons may be believed to be incarnations of the same grandfather, or to have "the same *kla*".

The Gã word for reincarnation means "a recurring cycle"; a word also used for a vine twining round a post, and reappearing continually up the post. Sterility is regarded as a great curse, for it interrupts the line of rebirth, the dead being only reborn in their own families.

When a child of young parents dies, they are shut up for seven days, to persuade the child to come back; they fix their thoughts on the dead infant, and tell it aloud that they desire its return. If no child comes within five years it is thought that the dead child is displeased.

Like the Ashanti, the Gã believe in a sky family, to which everybody belongs before coming into the world, and which is dearer to him than his earthly family. The soul (*susuma*) is always pining a little after its heavenly relatives, especially the wife or husband. Twins born in this world must have been brother and sister in heaven, but other relatives are strangers; stillborn babies have left without a farewell and so have to return to their sky family. When people cry in their sleep they are thought to be scolded by their sky family, because they have not fulfilled a promise made before leaving; a medium will be consulted to find out what the promise was. A man who prospers has pleased his sky family; but if they are not pleased with him they may "spend his money", or even "cover his face".¹

Reincarnation beliefs are often apparent in the manner in which names are given. The Agni of the Ivory Coast give a first-born son the name of his paternal grandfather; a first-born girl takes that of her maternal grandmother. Other children have the names of brothers of the paternal grandfather, and

¹ *Religion and Medicine of the Gã*, pp. 94-98, 175-197.

girls those of the sisters of the grandfather or of sisters of the child's father. There is matrilineal inheritance, but names come through the father. If a child's father dies while his wife is pregnant, the baby when born will take its father's name. The tenth child of an Agni woman was killed, for fear that the whole family would otherwise perish; the next child is called "ten", and not eleven.¹

The Adjukru believe that it is the personality-soul of the departed which can reincarnate. This takes place in a child which is conceived after the decease of the father. However, this does not mean that the whole spiritual complex is reincarnated, for the defunct person is still thought of as living in the after-world. I have found an interesting adaptation of this belief to Christian theology. Some modern Adjukru teachers explain that as the Spirit of God descended upon Jesus at his baptism, but yet God was not deprived of his Spirit, so we may understand that an ancestor communicates a portion of his spirit to the newborn child but continues still to live in the beyond by his same spirit.

UPPER GOLD COAST, UPPER IVORY COAST, SUDAN

In the northern territories, the Isala make sacrifices at ancestral shrines when a child is named. The child may be thought to be an ancestor reincarnated, and the parents ask the ancestor for help and protection. This child is placed on the knee of an elder, and its name is repeated three or four times, according to its sex. The ancestor whose name it has received, and who is thought to be responsible for its birth, is henceforward the child's guardian spirit. It is thought that a person's soul may go into a newborn baby, even during the lifetime of that person. But such an individual will die soon afterwards.

When a woman is buried, her brother may enter into the grave and whisper to the corpse not to be reborn into her husband's family, but to return to her own people. But one of her husband's family will then tell the corpse that her bride-wealth had been paid, and that she must return to the husband's town. If the gravedigger has bent an arm or a leg of a corpse in burying it, it is thought that on rebirth it will be deformed. But many deductions of this sort are based on very incomplete or even imaginary evidence; *post hoc ergo propter hoc*.

The Nankanse say that before they are born on earth children have spoken with God. If they have spoken badly, and told

¹ *Assinie et le Royaume de Krinjabo*, pp. 184-185.

him that they did not want a father or mother, or that they did not wish their food to nourish them, or that they never wanted to marry, then they may become ill, be spoilt, or die. But the diviner may reveal all this to the parents of the sickly child, and when due sacrifice is made good is thought to ensue.

The Dagaba think that if a baby cries a lot, that means that an ancestor wishes to become its guardian spirit. The father will see to this. The child will be given the name of its guardian ancestor, and the family will say "Grandfather has come home".¹

The Bambara, like most of the Sudanese tribes, believe profoundly in reincarnation. Several writers have indicated this as one of their firmest beliefs. Children are recognized to be ancestral spirits by their faces, or some special mark. The soul returns perpetually; when one life is finished another begins, and in the eternal flux parents and relatives are rejuvenated.

It is the personality-soul which is responsible for the reincarnation, which is called a "return" (*sagi*). The soul returns to its own family, even if its body has died far away from home. M. Monteil says that reincarnation is believed to take place twenty-four hours after the death of the person.²

Bambara children who die before adolescence are buried in the hut, with one member broken, often the right big toe, and sometimes the father marks the body with a knife on the chest, arm or shoulder. If the succeeding child born to the same mother has similar marks, it is proved to be the dead one reborn. A child born after a baby who has died often receives shameful names, either to make it ashamed of leaving its parents so soon, or else to deceive the spirit of disease so that it will not prey upon such a worthless child. It may be called: "shameless", "throw it away", "nothing".

Children receive the names of ancestors whom they resemble; this name is not used familiarly, and may only be known to the father and mother and a few intimate relatives. But a second, more public, name may express the same belief, such as "returned to life".³

Some tribes that have become Islamized, such as the Dyoula of the northern Ivory Coast, appear to have abandoned the belief of their pagan ancestors in reincarnation, even though this belief is still held by neighbouring pagan tribes at the

¹ *Tribes of the Ashanti Hinterland*, pp. 136, 319, 499-510.

² *Les Bambara de Ségou et du Kaarta*, pp. 56-60.

³ *La Religion Bambara*, pp. 31-36.

present day. They say that Allah creates children directly by his will, and sends them into their mother's womb, so that they are not reborn ancestors. But other tribes, like the Hausa, retain some reincarnational ideas, often restricted to exceptional cases.¹

TOGO AND DAHOMEY

The Dagomba of Togo think that the dead are reborn after a long journey to the world beyond. Both the souls of men and of animals normally come again, in similar form to the one which they had in their previous life on earth, though some men may return in the form of animals. Mourners are comforted with the words, "he will come back again".

Reference has been made to the belief in spiritual fathers and mothers; when a woman wants a child she will consult a priest who gets in contact with the spiritual relatives. When twins are born, the first to be born is thought to be the younger (like the children of Tamar), and it comes into the world to see if it is a good place, and to report to its yet unborn elder by crying.²

The Somba tribe, of northern Dahomey, have no funeral rites for those who die prematurely, the reason being given that if this was done the deceased person would be born again very quickly, and would die again prematurely. If these persons have any young children, when these grow older they may be now allowed to perform funeral rites for their parents who, if they had lived, would now be at a respectable age. Graves have side ledges, and those who die untimely are put into a grave that has one of these ledges left vacant.

The Ewe consult the popular oracle Ifa, to find out which ancestor has come back in the new-born child. This consultation may take place within a few months, or may be left for some years after the birth of the child. Various names of grandparents are suggested to the oracle, and according to the fall of the lot so the name of the ancestor is determined. If the oracle constantly refuses a name suggested, then it is assumed that this soul must have been annihilated for evil-doing.

The ancestor is referred to as the guardian genius (*jofo*), or the creator father (*to*), of the child. In the child are both a soul (*ye*) and the guardian genius. When offerings are made to the guardian genius of the child, it is to this now-declared ancestor

¹ *Le Noir de Bondoukou*, p. 276.

² *Tales told in Togoland*, p. 33.

that they will go. If a child has a very creased skin, it is said that his guardian genius must be very old.

It is said that God sends back to the earth the personal soul (*ye*), but not the spirit (*se*, *lindō*), for if the latter was reincarnated also then the same person would be reborn, identical in all particulars with the previous existence. God is said to give instructions to the unborn child (some deny this), but the message is exclusive and gives no hint of the lot of other souls.

Dead persons must be replaced on the earth by new ones, and families are not allowed to die out, for there are always some unknown relatives. The dead one must come back in his own family, and a proverb says that "a dead Ewe cannot return in the house of a Yoruba". Men cannot be reborn as women, or black people as white, though there are some, perhaps influenced by European and alien thought, who declare that the soul may be born far away in another clan, in other African countries or even in Europe.

Reincarnation is called "the return of beings" (*me-dide*), by the Fõn-Ewe. The highest reward that God can give to a soul that has done good upon earth, and thus merited his favour, is to send back that soul again to the earth as speedily as possible. The good always return, winning thus what they have put into life. There is no idea of life as fundamentally evil on earth, as in India, and no desire to get free from the round of existence. Some say that the minimum period between incarnations is two months, others put it at three years; there is no authority in these matters. But if the soul is evil God will keep it with him, and punish it even if it is spared annihilation. Some say that the soul makes sixteen journeys into this world, and that after this it goes into a tree, or is deified; this idea may be connected with the sixteen signs of the Ifa oracle.¹

Some of the Gũ-Ewe say that the dead may be reborn several years after their death. The child in whom the dead one has returned, is taken to a little hut built for the ancestral offerings: each family has one. The child is dressed in a white cloth, and laid before the metal standards (*asēn*) which represent the dead. The diviner consults the Ifa oracle, for each name of ancestors already dead in the family. If Ifa replies yes, on one of the names evoked, then it is that spirit from which the new-born child comes. Some diviners simply gaze into water, pretending to see there all those who are dead, and calling each by name. When the child has grown up, he will be told which

¹ *La Géomancie*, pp. 380-403; *Dahomey*, ii, pp. 232-237.

ancestor has reproduced him. If the child dies young, the same spirit reproduces itself in the same parents; this continues up to seven times. After that the dead one can stay definitively in the land of the dead.

One reason given for the belief in reincarnation is the limited supply of material with which to create human beings. In the early days when the world was young, at any rate, there was not a lot of material or spiritual matter, and so when one man died God took this material to fashion another man. The material now comes from the ancestors, and this explains the resemblance of a child to his grandparents, proving participation in their substance. Like the Gã, the other Ewe think that there is a limited amount of soul-stuff, but nevertheless the number of ancestors in the beyond is on the increase.

SOUTHERN NIGERIA

The Yoruba call reincarnation "the shooting forth of a branch" (*yiya*), or "born again" (*tunbi*). Reincarnation is believed to be the normal process, for those who have lived well, and there seems to be no limit to the number of times that this may take place. The same soul, but not the same spirit, returns. Despite the circulation of soul-stuff, the number of ancestors increases.

When a mother is bereaved, those who come to console her will say, "the dead will be reborn".

A child is said to be "born with a name", when it bears a manifest resemblance to an ancestor, or when the circumstances of its birth are such as to indicate clearly its provenance. A male child that resembles its grandfather is called "father comes again" (*babatunde*), and a female child who has this resemblance is called *abiba*. A girl who is born soon after the death of its grandmother is called "mother comes again" (*yetunde*). All children need not be thus "born with a name", but all must receive their name, declared by the oracle. The ceremony of consulting the diviner, to find out which ancestor reincarnates in the newborn child, is called by the Yoruba "the act of knowing the child".

The Yoruba, like other tribes, think that the souls of children who are about to be born live in or near trees, and so women go to pray by these trees when they wish for children. Children who are stillborn are called "born to die" (*abiku*), and this term has been borrowed by the neighbouring Ewe. The same mother is thought to be capable of giving birth to the same

abiku child, several times in succession. Marks are made on the body of the dead child, and the next child is said sometimes to have similar marks. The soul of such a baby is variously stated to return to God between incarnations, or to remain near to the mother.

The Ibo believe in a cycle of existence, in which men and women live the life purposed for them, and then die to reappear later. Thus a succession of human beings is maintained, though the link may be broken when a child dies before fulfilling its purpose for which it was born. But this loss may be made up in a future existence, as there is no reason why the child may not return and have another chance. The death of a child may be due to accident, or to the designs of some evil man; but if two or more children die in succession, there can be no doubt that it is the same child returning. The corpse of such a child is marked, and prayer made so that it may not return; in some places the corpse is burnt outside the village, or dismembered. The mother will sleep in another hut, so that the spirit of the child may not find her if it returns. The next baby is carefully scrutinized, to discover whether there are any traces of the marks made on its predecessor.

Reincarnation is thought to be into the same family, or among the relatives, if possible, and when this is believed to have happened everybody is happy. A woman may be born in her father's home, and if this is considered to have occurred, her husband's family have no claim upon her.

At the same time as a person is reincarnated, the Ibo think that the spirit still lives in the land of spirits. It continues to receive homage and offerings. Reincarnation depends upon the behaviour of the soul, on earth and in the world beyond. The length of time spent in the after-world is determined by a man's deeds in the body. One who dies suddenly may be reborn within a fortnight, though some say that a month is the minimum. Those who die young are thought always to return to earth more speedily than those who die in old age. Men may have some say in their future lot, by petitioning God as to its hour. Everybody has a right to rebirth, so that it is his own fault if this is lost; for evil spirits may be banished to a state intermediate between earth and heaven, where they pass their days in wandering, and are forbidden ever to be reborn upon this sunlit earth.¹

Among the Ibibio, when a child dies in infancy its hair is cut

¹ *Niger Ibos*, pp. 282-285.

REINCARNATION

off and taken by a priest to a shrine, with the prayer that its soul may not wander too far, but return to the parents from whom it has been removed. If the child "keeps on dying", i.e. if there is a succession of children who die but who are believed to be animated by the same spirit, a finger or a toe is cut off so that it may be recognized, or the body is burnt so that it may not return. There is clearly a close connexion between the body and the soul which inhabits it. Any mutilation of a corpse, or desecration of a grave, is thought to hinder reincarnation. To prevent this, bodies used sometimes to be buried in secret places, while the public funeral would be carried out with an effigy of the dead chief. Reincarnation is believed to take place a year or two later, and to be into the same family, unless the dead man has been ill-used in his previous life, in which eventuality he will take offence and seek rebirth elsewhere.¹

The Ifaw believe that a soul may be reincarnated about a month after death, and not usually more than three years after. The semi-Bantu Yache believe the interval between lives to be from two to ten months. Life on earth is preferable to the beyond, but some spirits go into trees between incarnations, and like to stay there for a long time. The Yache think that rebirth does not usually occur in the same family, says Talbot.

Other semi-Bantu tribes in Nigeria think that the dead are reborn by the same mother, or in a friend's house. If there are no brothers and sisters remaining in the house, the spirit will not return, because no one will be there to welcome it. Some think that the interval after which rebirth takes place corresponds to the length of gestation, nine months, showing thus that the dead begin to return again immediately after death. But other tribes believe the period to be less than the time spent in the mother's womb, and this would be explicable as due to the child sharing the same soul-stuff as the ancestor who is reborn.²

NORTHERN NIGERIA

The Jukun say that when a man admires another of fine character, he resolves to ask the god of the world beyond to let him be reborn in the form of that man. If he has had much suffering, he may determine to request to be reborn as a woman, or as a European. Prayer to the god of the spiritual world is thought to be efficacious, in securing a rise in status for the

¹ *Life in Southern Nigeria*, pp. 140-151.

² *Peoples of Southern Nigeria*, pp. 271-273.

next incarnation. A poor man will request to be born as a rich man, or as a member of the royal family. One who has no children will ask that in his next life all the women whom he marries may be fertile. One who does not agree very well with his family may ask to be born into another clan. A mother may threaten her child that, if he does not stop crying, in her next life she will be born from her own child and will annoy it by crying in similar fashion.

It does not necessarily follow that all these petitions of the dissatisfied soul will be granted; it will have to accept the fate allotted to it. The god of the after-world gives a new body, but not a new soul, and the character of a man cannot be changed. Even the physical appearance of a man continues, in some sort, into the next life; a deformity may be still the distinguishing mark by which the identity of an ancestor reborn is asserted. When a mother dies in childbirth the infant is removed from her belly, here as among many other tribes, so that she will not be reborn with a big belly. Lame and blind people are thought to have been the same in a previous life. But evil men may be condemned to the "land of red earth", and to lose forever the chance of reincarnation.

The Jukun think of the soul as composed of two parts, says Meek: one is the soul of birth, which can reincarnate; the other is the unreincarnated soul, which remains in the spiritual world. The soul of rebirth, when anxiously seeking reincarnation, is said to go into houses in the form of locust bean leaves, while a man is having sexual relations with his wife; reincarnation would thus appear to begin from the moment of conception.¹

Other northern Nigerian tribes have more hazy ideas of rebirth, and there are apparently few consistently worked out theories. In the Bachama tribe, when a child cries excessively the diviner is consulted and he may declare the child to be a certain returned forefather. The child is then given a small loincloth, and miniature bow and arrows, as if he were an adult. His mother takes him into the fields and shows him the cows, goats and sheep, telling him that these are his cattle, just as he left them when dying as a grandfather, and so he must not cry any longer for they are all his and none are missing.

The Margi think that the good can be reborn, but that the evil undergo a second death, being destroyed by fire. They believe in the sky-relatives, counterparts of men—fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters; they consider that trees and animals

¹ *A Sudanese Kingdom*, pp. 198-210.

also have their spiritual counterparts. The Jukun do not think that animals have spiritual counterparts, though they believe that every adult man has a spiritual paramour. Both Jukun and Margi believe that the wife whom a man married as a virgin will be his only wife in the after-world.

The Gola believe that the dead are reborn into the family of their father or their mother. But if a person is thought to be a reincarnate ancestor whose identity is obvious, he does not receive the name of this ancestor until he has been through the initiation ceremony; otherwise it is thought that the ancestor will be angry and will leave the world.

Belief in rebirth is not greatly developed among the Katab, but is manifest in particular instances. If a hunter is killed in the bush, his own posthumous child will be thought to be his father reborn, and a search may be made for the mark of a shot similar to that which killed his father. A person who meets with a violent death is thought to be capable of rebirth through his widow when she remarries, and to bear the trace of the wound by which he had died.

The Gabin of Adamawa province believe that the good are reborn, and that a baby which cries unduly is an ancestor who has come back to earth to recover the property which he had left behind. Hence bows and arrows, tools and other articles, are laid beside a crying baby. The Yungur say that a spirit who wishes to be reborn into this world sits on a tree until he sees a good woman, with a good husband, and then enters into her womb.

The Jen believe that when an enemy is slain in war, he may seek reincarnation through his slayer's wife. In the earlier days of frequent tribal warfare, if the wife of a warrior who had killed an enemy became pregnant and was hysterical, it was imagined that her baby was the dead enemy. But if the enemy thought that his slayer was a bad man, he would not consent to this rebirth, but would pursue the man as a ghost.¹

Many of the Nigerian plateau tribes (Ba, Irigwe, Sangawa, Pakara) think that the spirits of the departed hover near their old haunts in tree branches, awaiting the chance of rebirth into the womb of a woman of the same tribe. The Kagoro think that the souls of animals may be born in the children of hunters who kill them. Others (Kona, Kagoma, Mumbake) think that souls come back sometimes as meteorites, and that stones are sometimes found inside animals, containing human souls.

¹ *Tribal Studies*, i, pp. 44, 223, 278; ii, pp. 62, 378, 462.

The Kusopachi Nupe are said to think that man has four existences, of which human life is the second. In each rebirth the body gets smaller, and finally it is a dwarf-like being. Evil men never arrive at the final stages, but turn into forest animals.¹

The Kwotto belief in reincarnation is similar to that held elsewhere. Birth is believed to be produced by the entrance of the spirit (*ekiti*) of a grandfather or other ancestor. The mother may have had a dream in which the ancestor has appeared to her, during pregnancy, and the child may resemble his grandfather. The child may be declared to be the reincarnation of his grandmother, but he will not therefrom receive a woman's name. Perhaps the mother was passing under a tree, when she first felt the quickening movement of the child in her womb, and it is believed that ancestors lurk in the branches of trees. The diviner declares the identity of the ancestral spirit who is reborn; but this does not mean that nothing of the ancestor remains in the beyond, for offerings will still be made at his grave.

Generally the Kwotto think that it is a departed spirit which is reincarnate, but occasionally an old man may be thought to animate a child. Wilson-Haffenden tells of a village chief who died at a great age, and whose waning strength was considered to be correlated to the growing strength of a grandchild, into whom the old man's force had entered. The old man was very jealous of the boy, and believed that if he came into physical contact with him he would lose the rest of his powers. The paramount chief of the Kwotto, a divine incarnation, was believed to be able to animate a number of grandchildren during his lifetime.²

We may now have some idea of the beliefs held by West Africans concerning reincarnation, although full details are not available from all areas. There seems to be general agreement that reincarnation is a most desirable thing, the reward of the righteous; punishment for misdeeds takes the form of a prolonged interval between births or, worst of all, complete prohibition of rebirth. This mortal existence, despite its sorrows, is evidently regarded as the best of all possible worlds.

Moral judgments are not absent from the belief in reincarnation in Africa, but they work in the opposite direction from

¹ *Northern Tribes of Nigeria*, pp. 37-38.

² *Red Men of Nigeria*, pp. 236-237, 248-249.

Indian belief, promoting return to earth rather than liberation from the chain of existence. Despite some variations of thought, it is not generally believed that a man's spiritual progress is advanced or retarded greatly, in his new incarnation, by the consequences of a previous life. Reward and punishment are usually held to be worked out in the interval between births, and not to be carried over into a new existence on earth. Sickness and misfortune are much more likely to be attributed to the machinations of witches, than to the wrongdoing of a previous existence.

When one enquires as to whether the successive births are thought to profit the souls, or the personalities with which they are connected, it seems that this question has scarcely occurred to Africans. No one appears to be concerned as to the possibility of a succession of lives, alternately good and bad. The aim of reincarnation, then, would not be the perfecting of the soul, but simply and positively the acquisition of life, the return to full vital force, in this great terrestrial world of life.

Humanity as a whole does not seem to be thought of as necessarily advanced by these rebirths, in the European sense of progress. Indeed, many look back to the past as to a golden age, and despite the inventions of Europeans, and a higher material standard of living for many, yet this age is regarded by many of the older people as degenerate and only occupied with the pursuit of money and pleasure. The sole way in which humanity benefits from reincarnation is by the reinforcement of the vitality of the whole, the maintenance of the flow of soul-stuff.

There are differences of opinion as to the moment at which the spirit of the ancestor comes into a child. Some appear to think that this takes place at conception, the spirit entering the embryo; others associate it with the naming ceremony, though this may be perhaps simply the time when the identity of the spirit is discovered. There does not seem to be any general thought about the possibility of remembering what happened in a previous existence on earth.

Much more complex is the belief in the relationship of the soul of the newborn child to that of his reincarnate forefather. What soul, if any, has the child before the entry of the ancestor? Often no answer can be given; either because the ordinary layman has a more crude and concrete idea of reincarnation than the philosophical few, or because the idea has simply not

been considered. But some peoples, like the Ewe, have thinkers who give more distinct, and developed answers; they regard the ancestral soul as a stranger to or as a guardian of the person with whom it is associated.

The European will question the validity of continuing to offer sacrifice to ancestors who have reincarnated, and whose bodies have become dust, as the African knows well. One reply given to this objection was that the offerings are made to memories; another, that they are made to the collective ancestors.

An even more disconcerting problem is that of the reincarnation of one ancestor in two or more grandchildren. Two brothers may well have boys, born about the same time in different villages, and these may both resemble their grandfather and be declared each by a diviner to be his reincarnation. Some of the Ewe say that the ancestors do not reincarnate corporeally, but that one ancestral spirit simply touches several mortals; but it is difficult to know whether this is an individual and sophisticated opinion, or whether it represents an underlying idea that has hitherto escaped us. Or is it simply that the African has worked upon elementary facts, the resemblance of several children to one parent, and has drawn an obvious conclusion, with a fine disregard for logical consequences?

It has been suggested that not the whole "block" soul is reborn, but rather an emanation of its vital force. Dr. Doke comes to a similar conclusion in treating of the belief of the Rhodesian Lamba: "It seems that it is not the entire spirit which is reincarnated at birth, but a kind of afflatus from it. This view is borne out by the fact that the spirit of one ancestor may be born into more than one babe at the same time. This is further confirmed by the fact that the spirit is still honoured and propitiated after a child bearing the same name has been born."¹

And Dr. Smith says: "My old friend Mungalo now sitting smoking a pipe with me, or sitting yonder under the eaves of his hut and carving a wooden spoon, is the Mungalo who lived here a hundred years ago and, furthermore, Mungalo is his *musedi*, his guardian spirit, shall we say, always accompanying him, guarding him, warning him of danger.

"There is here some metaphysical subtlety. The spirit that assumes a material body is not confined to that body; being spirit it cannot be imprisoned in the material. It is in the body

¹ *Op cit.*, p. 241.

and yet is not of the body; it is there as a kind of aura, surrounding and protecting the body."¹

In view of such involved issues, common to many other parts of Africa, Father Tempels denies that Africans think of reincarnation in our sense at all. "European observers very generally deduce that there is here belief in metempsychosis, in the strict sense of the word. This point must be elucidated, since the black people cannot imagine an individual outside of this [clan] relation, which has been improperly designated metempsychosis."

It is true that Africans say that a mother has given birth to an uncle, or that a certain dead spirit is born to them; but since the same ancestor may "come back" in several living members of the clan, all of whom bear his name, it is apparent that this does not correspond to the classical conception of Reincarnation. In addition, the dead one is not thought to have ceased to exist, because he appears as a child. The child is not in all points identical with the ancestor, and the latter continues to live in the beyond. The ancestor will be the guardian of the child, the protector of his namesake, whom the child will invoke when he reaches the age of reason.

Therefore, says Tempels, "when black people speak of dead who return and are reborn, it must not be understood that they are speaking of metempsychosis in the classical sense that we give to this word". This author interprets the African belief in reincarnation by recourse to his exposition of the philosophy of forces. The ancestor is not the creator of the child, for God is that; he is not the agent of conception, neither is it strictly speaking his person which is reborn. The child receives its life from God but, even while yet in the mother's womb, he finds himself under the vital influence, the "ontological influence", of an ancestor who is in some vital relation to his parents. Instead of saying that it is a definite man who returns, one might be more correct in estimating it to be part of the personal vitality of the ancestor which returns to take part in the clan life, through the vital influence shed upon the newborn child by this departed one. The name is renewed in the clan, thus creating a vital clan influence; and the child comes under the patronage and reinforcing power of its forefather.²

¹ *Knowing the African*, pp. 103-104.

² *Op. cit.*, pp. 85-88.

METAMORPHOSIS

"METAMORPHOSIS, transformation, or shape-shifting is a power universally believed in at low levels of culture. . . . Where the idea of spirit or soul exists, and where it is thought that the spirit can leave its containing body, nothing is easier to believe further that it can enter for a time into an animal or a tree."¹

The theory of an "external soul" is one that has been made much of by Sir James Frazer, particularly in *Balder the Beautiful*. The external soul, or "bush soul", is described as deposited in the bush or some other place for safety; to be one of the several souls of man; to be closely related to some animal or plant, so that the death of the animal would cause the death of the person with whom it was related at the same moment; to be represented by an animal into which a man is believed to be able to change temporarily and at will.

Some of these beliefs are practically universal, and are found at some of the lowest stages of culture. The Australian totemic system was "based upon the idea of the reincarnation of Alcheringa ancestors, who were the actual transformations of animals and plants. . . . To the Australian native there is no difficulty in the assumption that an animal or a plant could be transformed directly into a human being, or that the spirit part which he supposes it to possess, just as he does in his own case, could at some future time arise in the form of a human being."² Even the Jews had a not dissimilar belief, and in the writings of the Jewish mystics and the Cabballah there is often to be found the belief in sinners, who have been condemned to wander about on the earth in the form of animals.³

The Egyptians do not appear to have had clear ideas of reincarnation, until a late period. But belief in metamorphosis was very common. The earliest Egyptian story relates how a wax model was changed into a living crocodile. In the *Book of the Dead* there are fourteen chapters which tell of ways by which the dead one may be changed into whatever form it pleases: hawk, god, phoenix, heron, swallow, lily, worm, crocodile.⁴

¹ *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, viii, pp. 593-594.

² Spencer and Gillen, *Native Tribes of Central Australia*, 1899, p. 124.

³ *Folklore of the Jews*, p. 6.

⁴ *E.R.E.*, xii, pp. 425-435.

Some of the notions of metamorphosis are current in West Africa, but not all, nor in the same degree in different regions. Considerable perspicacity is required to discover the relationship of the soul to its possible manifestations. The most common idea is in the power of witches to change themselves into animal form. It is much more rare to hear of a man having the power of changing another person into an animal shape, an idea very common in European mythology. It is not unlikely that there is a connexion between totemistic beliefs, present or past, and the idea of metamorphosis into animal form.

LOWER GOLD COAST AND IVORY COAST

Among the Akan and coastal peoples, it is principally witches who are thought to be able to change into animal form. Witches are believed to change into herbivorous animals, such as deer and wild hogs, and then to ravage an enemy's farm, so that all his harvest is ruined. They are held to be able to take the flowers from a neighbour's plants, and take them, while in animal form, into their own plantation so that their crop is more abundant. Great abundance may be thought to be due to witchcraft on the part of the owner of the crops; long life is likewise suspect, and so prosperity is not without its dangers. Great misfortune may be attributed to the witchcraft exercised by an enemy, or to the evil eye of some mischief-maker.

In the southern Ivory Coast, I was told of a witch who had turned himself into a bird, that is to say that his soul or some power had gone into bird shape, while his human body was still in the village. This bird perched on the roof of one of the huts, and somebody shot it down with a gun; at the very same moment as the bird died the witch with whom it was associated died also. Another person told me of a woman whose soul had similarly entered into a crocodile; when the girls went down to the lagoon to bathe, the crocodile seized one of them and began to drag her into the water, but another bolder than the rest caught up a spear and fatally wounded the crocodile. At the same instant the witch, who was in her hut in the village, died also.

This very common belief may be thought to illustrate the conception of an "external soul". But we have seen in previous chapters that it usually appears to be man's personality-soul (*sunsum*, *ye*, *ɔkān*, in Twi, Ewe, and Yoruba), which is thought to wander about in dreams, and witches send out their personal soul to devour the spirit (*'kra*, *se-lindō*, *emi*) of their

enemies. It would, therefore, appear unnecessary to postulate a further "soul" for a witch, but to consider him endowed with an extraordinary power, the power of separating his soul from his body, not only during the night, when it flies about as a bat or an owl, but sometimes even in the daytime when it ravages crops or attacks unsuspecting victims, in animal form.

In Sierra Leone, the Mende say that witches take the rice from the farms, they change themselves into rats and eat the rice; these rats are very hard to catch, but if one is caught and killed then someone in the village is sure to die. Sometimes witches are thought to change into birds, and eat the rice from the fields in the daytime. The Temne of Sierra Leone say that witches have an extra pair of eyes, and can see invisible things; they can change into leopards, crocodiles, elephants, wild hogs, or birds. They are thought to spoil the crops in any of these forms, by day or by night. It is also believed that witches can enter into other persons, or cause others to turn into animals and use them for evil ends.¹

Another side of the belief in metamorphosis is that of a pact, supposedly made at times between a man and an animal, by which the man can become invisible or turn into an animal form. The Agni and Baoule of the Ivory Coast have legends of alliance and of service rendered by an animal to a man, and a much older myth tells of kinship established between animals and certain clans. Both stories are current today.

It seems that one, perhaps the main, root of these beliefs is in the original totemism of the people. Some of the tribes of the Ivory Coast believe that the souls of their ancestors go to live in great toads in nearby swamps, and they think that when one of the toads dies some important elder of the village dies also. Others have sacred crocodiles attached to the village, and if one dies some human being in the village dies also.

The Kanga-Bonou and the Gouro believe in the kinship of certain men with animals. Some have the power of changing into an animal, whose flesh is tabu to them. These are generally leopards, and a witch may become a were-leopard, and prey on his enemies. A clear distinction is made between these metamorphosed leopards and the wild leopards of the forest; the latter are said not to attack man unless first injured.²

¹ M. K. Curley and Sappri Turi, in *Africa*, viii, pp. 556-558.

² *Nègres Gouro et Gagou*, p. 222.

UPPER GOLD COAST, UPPER IVORY COAST, SUDAN

Many northern tribes believe in the rebirth of ancestors into animal form, and this appears to be much more current in the north than among the coastal tribes. The Nankanse, who have a leopard totem, say that when an elder of the clan is dying a leopard appears in the compound, and when the man dies he "rises up a leopard". Some say that women do not turn into leopards, nor children who die before they have begun to observe the clan tabus, or who die before their mother has had another child, and who therefore have not had proper funeral rites and are not full members of the clan. Men cannot become leopards during life, but a leopard appears when they are in agony. Men are called only in anger by their totem name: "crocodile-rising man"; "leopard-rising fellow". Excessive abuse, by revealing the tabu to all and sundry, would stop the metamorphosis into the animal at death.

The Nankanse, who have this totem, treat leopards as relatives, and bury dead ones if they are found. But a second burial is not made, as it would be for a human being, because it is said that the leopard is an ancestor, and has already had a second funeral held for him. The secrets of the totem are passed on from father to son, secretly and at night. The son is told not to kill a leopard when he sees one, for in doing so he would kill his father. When his father dies he will turn into a leopard, after the burial, and will come back again to the compound, climbing the wall and entering the courtyard. The son must keep vigil and see what happens, then in his turn he will some day "rise up a leopard". The wife and daughter will not be admitted into this secret.¹

The Tallensi likewise have sacred animals who are regarded as the ancestors of the clan, to kill them being thought almost as bad as murder. The sacred crocodiles are treated almost as human beings, and as ancestors are said not to hurt men. If these animals are found dead they are given a token funeral. They say that notable ancestors "rise up again" as one of these animals. But, says Dr. Fortes, the Tallensi deny that this means reincarnation or transmigration of souls. The totems are related to the earth and to ancestors; the link is the belief in the "living mystical force, symbolized in living creatures". Hence the animals are symbols of the continuing power and efficacy of the ancestors among their surviving relatives.

¹ *Tribes of the Ashanti Hinterland*, pp. 234-238.

The ancestors remain among their kindred, the sacred animals being present in the locality, in pools and in the bush. The tribe is thus tied to the locality, to the ancestors, to the animals, and to the earth which is a living power.¹ Once again, we cannot insist on too concrete a view of the soul, in its peregrinations, even though it may popularly be spoken of in a somewhat crude manner; the vital forces which compose the personality are subtle and elude precise definition.

The Nankanse also have the belief in the power of witches to change into animals. A person bitten by a snake is often said to have been killed by a witch. They likewise hold the less common belief that a witch can make someone else's soul enter into an animal. This animal is then killed and eaten by the witches; but there is the usual mysterious notion of witchcraft, in that the human meal is only visible to those who have special vision, whereas to ordinary mortals it would seem that the witches were eating from empty plates.²

The Ivory Coast Kulango believe that certain persons can change themselves at will into animals, usually wild animals such as leopards and hyenas. The aim of this metamorphosis is not to prey on men, or to deceive hunters, but for self-defence or to be able to watch over their plantations during the night. The transformation is effected by bathing in water, in which some medicine has been soaked. Some families can change into their totem beast, whose flesh is tabu to them, and from which they claim ancestry.

The neighbouring Dyoula have similar beliefs, attenuated by their acceptance of Muhammadanism. The leopard is tabu to them, and they think that it will not harm a member of their tribe. The explanation is given that the leopards are their grandfathers. Formerly, they say, their grandfathers changed into leopards on death, they "rose up as leopards", but since they have become Muslims they have not done that. Yet the Dyoula maintain also the unhistorical assertion that their ancestors were loyal Muslims, and even Muhammadan religious leaders.³

The Bobo, of the upper Ivory Coast, believe that witches sometimes change into dogs or cats. Such animals are killed, if recognized as metamorphosed, and the witch is said to be found dead on the morrow. The neighbouring Kasuna say that the witch will seek one out the next morning: three searches

¹ *Dynamics of Clanship*, p. 143.

² *Ashanti Hinterland*, loc. cit.

³ *Le Noir de Bondoukou*, p. 272.

are made for a man, and four for a woman, and if he finds his murderer he will kill him. Hence the dog or cat killer hides in his hut, with guards at the door, lest he die in place of the witch. One dog was said to have been decapitated, and the witch found next morning without a head, or rather with a mushroom-shaped anthill in place of a head. A kindred tribe, the Sisala, say that some witches change into cats with snouts like pigs, or into elephants breathing out flames. If these animals are killed, the witch becomes a man again in order to die. These witches feed on human souls, and on death they change into animals.¹

Although the Bambara have long since passed the totemistic stage, there are traces still of a very ancient belief that the souls of the departed go to dwell in the bodies of totem animals. The souls of those who have a snake totem go into that species of snake, whence they return later to be reincarnated through a woman of that clan. They believe that those who have an animal totem can change into that animal. Villages and clans have their totems, animals, and plants that protect the members of their clan, who in their turn tabu the flesh of their totem.

The Bambara distinguish between wise men who can change into human form, but do no harm to anyone, and witches who are destructive of human life. The former wash with certain leaves and water, and change at once into the desired shape. They cannot be caught, and people do not bother about them; indeed there are very few of them. Only hunters can injure these metamorphosed sages; but that again is exceedingly rare, for in their human form they hear all the plans of the hunters, and so avoid them when in animal shape. If a hunter should attack them, these were-animals would eat his body but not his soul. This is held to be proved by hunters who have tracked lions, and found places where the lion tracks suddenly gave way to human footprints. It is possible that there is some connexion with the cannibalistic leopard-societies, which were once such a scourge in the western forests. But more probable is it that the latter are to be identified with the second category of Bambara thought on these matters, the evil witches whose souls enter animals, and who eat human spirits. These are also the ravagers of crops and destroyers of prosperity.²

¹ *Le Noir du Soudan*, pp. 65, 231, 353.

² *La Religion Bambara*, pp. 72-86, 113-117.

TOGO, DAHOMEY, SOUTHERN NIGERIA

The principal belief of the Ewe concerning metamorphosis is the notion that witches do harm in animal form. In Togo it is said that witches ride on the backs of animals when they ravage crops, which they do in revenge for some imagined slight. A witch is held to be able to change his form, and to become any animal he pleases: snake, buffalo, hog, bird. A witch is said to be able to cause lightning when there is no storm. If a hunter sees one of these animals in the daytime he does not shoot it, except when he has a charm against witchcraft on him; if he does kill it he will not eat the animal's flesh.

I have been assured by Dahomean friends that hunters can change into animals, or become invisible so as to approach their prey or hide from danger; these are good men, it is only bad men who change into leopards or crocodiles to harm others. I have referred elsewhere (in *West African Religion*) to the traditional beliefs of the Fõn in a blood-pact made by a hunter with an animal who was a forest fairy; and also to the royal myth of Abomey in which their dynasty sprang from the union of a leopard with a princess. The royal family still have facial marks, resembling claw marks.

The Yoruba believe that witches change into small birds; those who are old women cry out when flying about in bird form. Hyenas are thought at times to be indwelt by human souls, and some monkeys as well. Red monkeys are believed to be related to twins, who are themselves often called monkeys; the souls of dead twins are believed to live in the forest as monkeys. It is not generally believed that the soul of a dead person enters into an animal or a plant, but that this may happen in exceptional cases, particularly when the funeral rites have not been fully performed, for those who have died accidentally, or from some horrible disease; and then their souls can neither go to the land of the dead nor be reincarnated as men, but they enter trees, monkeys, and other animals.

The Yoruba believe that certain doctors have medicines which they give to hunters, and if they are pursued by dangerous beasts they can turn into ants. Similarly thieves can change into cats or dogs to avoid capture, or to enter a hut without being seen. I have been told categorically of a house which was burgled, despite the fact that a strict watch was kept on it all night, and the only living creature that entered was a cat. The deduction was obvious.

The Edo belief appears to be less pronounced than that of neighbouring tribes. The Oba of Benin was thought to be able to change into a bird. Some hunters can change their form, but generally the power of metamorphosis is confined to witches who appear as owls, birds, and leopards.

The Ijaw think that few men have this power. Witches, and evil men who have not received proper burial honours, cannot be reborn on earth and so enter into animals, and particularly into the monkeys which live near cemeteries and which are never killed. When one of these animals dies, the soul inhabiting it enters into another animal of the same species.¹

The Ibo believe that reincarnation can only take place in human form, but that certain people have the power of changing themselves into animals at will. The commonest change is into a crocodile, and sometimes when a man is bitten by a crocodile he will accuse another person of having attacked him by witchcraft. Metamorphosis is called "turn into animal", and by some is associated with certain clans or quarters of a town, all of whose inhabitants possess this power. Some can change thus by day, but it is possible to all members of the clan at night-time. They declare that it is quite different from a dream, and that on returning to their bodies they can remember all that they have done. Those who need not take a medicine to operate this change simply have to decide, before they go to sleep, whether they will project their soul or not.

A distinction is made between those whose power to metamorphose is inborn, in whom the soul simply assumes the form desired, and those who acquire the power by medicine given by a doctor. Rarely is it said that the person actually changes entirely, his real body becoming invisible; normally it is the soul which assumes the animal form, the body remaining asleep or in a trance. Those who have the inborn power can only change into one type of animal, which is hereditary, and apparently a derivation from totemism.

The Ibibio call metamorphosis the "going out of the soul". The soul stays in its human body during the day, but goes abroad at night. A man may obtain an "affinity" through medicine, and he may occasionally have several affinities and may choose which form he will enter, according to his purpose at the moment. If the animal into which the soul has entered dies, then the man also invariably dies. But some say that if the man's body dies, the animal wanders about in a senseless

¹ *Peoples of Southern Nigeria*, pp. 234 ff.

and dazed condition, and is easily killed by anyone who meets it. These metamorphosing people are looked on with suspicion, as they may be witches and destroyers of human souls.

There is doubtless a connexion between the belief in metamorphosis and the secret societies, whose members so often wear animal masks and act plays as animals. Masks and skins being worn, it used to be believed that men had changed into animals for a time. Those who revered cats jumped on the roofs of huts, just as cats do. Conversely, the real animals with which men were in association were supposed to be able to walk on their hind legs like men, at times and especially at midday; they were thought to enter the village like men, when the inhabitants had gone off to their farms, and to steal domestic animals.

Most of the Nigerian Bantu tribes believe in the metamorphosis of witches; those who claim this power are suspect. The power may be bought from a doctor, but children are not permitted to use the medicine, lest they abuse it and do themselves harm. Some people inherit affinities, which enter the foetus during coitus. It is sometimes said that men always enter the same animal, and put a mark on it so as to be able to recognize it; this seems to imply that the animal is always alive in the bush, and is only entered at times by the soul of the man who possessed it. But more research is needed on this point.¹

NORTHERN NIGERIA

The tribes of northern Nigeria have mostly the belief in the bond existent between a man and an animal. The well-being of one depends upon the well-being of the other, and if the man dies the animal dies at the same time. Such animals are tabu.

The royal clans of some of the Bura believe themselves related to crocodiles, which live in a lake occupying a volcanic crater. These crocodiles do not appear to embody the souls of the dead, nor is it that the soul of the chief is deposited in them for safety, nor that clan members can change into crocodiles. At Tilla, however, when the chief is fatally ill his crocodile is said to leave the water, and go to a shrine where is a priest. A message is sent to the village that the chief's crocodile has left the water, and salt and a winding-sheet are sent for the burial of the reptile. Only the chief's crocodile is believed to act in

¹ *Peoples of Southern Nigeria*, pp. 239-250.

this manner, although all members of the royal clan have their crocodile affinity.

Other Bura clans believe themselves to be related to animals, and their souls enter into them at times. If a man who is related to a hyena awakes with a full stomach, after a hyena has stolen a neighbour's dog in the night, he knows that his soul has really been in the hyena. Some people consult a priest, in order to obtain animals as protecting genii; after the ceremony the consultant receives a miniature animal, which is supposed to turn into the larger animal with which alliance is desired. A man may be associated with several animals at once, but has to promise the priest not to use these alliances for evil purposes.

The Kilba are reputed by their neighbours to have the power to enter into such close relationship with some animals, that whatever happens to one comes upon the other at the same time. They do not think that a double of an animal is born at the same time as a man; but an alliance is contracted with an animal, by the intermediacy of a priest. The aim of this alliance is to strengthen and prolong the life of the contractor, the man benefiting by the food eaten by his animal counterpart. So a man who is allied to a lion becomes as strong as a lion, and is fed by its food; when he is dying the lion roars outside his hut. Apparently a free choice of animals is possible, although the animal selected may be a curious one, such as a lizard; the choice may be motivated by totemism. Nearby tribes have a strong belief in twin animals, based upon totemic kindred organizations, the heads of which are custodians of the totem souls.

The Margi contract alliances with animals, through certain priests. No one will admit openly to having done this, but will say that many others do so. A miniature animal is received from the priest, and given into the care of the maternal uncle of the consultant, who feeds it until it is full-sized, and then releases it into the bush. When the contract is made, a clause is inserted ensuring that when the man dies his twin animal may survive to injure his enemies. Thus it is not thought obligatory for the animal to die at the same time as the man with whom it is linked.

Some of the Katab revere the crocodile, but there does not now seem to be belief that dying persons enter crocodiles. Yet when an old man is dying his friends sing—"the water is all astir—the crocodile is entering".

Some of the Jaba are thought to be able to turn into leopards, and neighbours of this tribe believe that all the Jaba are were-animals. There is said to be a female society, which is particularly associated with animals; the members prepare corpses for burial, and girls are initiated into animal rites during the funeral ceremonies.¹

Dreams often indicate the persistence of beliefs in metamorphosis. Many women of northern Nigeria believe that to dream of a snake is a sign of conception; this is easily explicable by the Freudian symbolism, and may be one of the archetypal thoughts, as suggested by Jung. The Kanuri believe that if a woman conceives while she is lying on a leopard's skin, she will have a male child.

Many think that if a woman first becomes aware of pregnancy when passing under a tree, then that tree is specially sacred. The spirit that came into her womb has come from the tree, under which she had passed or sat, or from a snake or a bird that she was looking at when she first felt the quickening of the child.

Some of the Kanuku and Anga keep pythons in their huts, and let children play with them. These snakes are said to contain ancestral spirits who protect the family; since these snakes are harmless and become attached to their homes, they can easily be regarded as benevolent spirits. Other northern tribes believe that the spirits of the dead enter into lions or elephants.

There is a general belief in lycanthropy in northern Nigeria. Some men have the power of changing into animals, usually the hyena. These are witches who live on human souls. Others metamorphose in order to steal sheep and fowls, or to reconnoitre the position of the enemy in warfare. The power of metamorphosis is generally thought to be hereditary, and is into the form of the animal which is the totem of the clan, and whose flesh is tabu to its members. There is a link with the totem animal, in that when one dies in the forest, a member of the clan will be dying at the same time, or approximately so, there being no exact calculation of time.

Some of the Makangara attribute certain types of lunacy to the injury of the animal counterpart of man. The madman may simulate an animal during one of his fits, and this might give rise to the association of himself with such an animal. Sickness among the Berom may be attributed to the displeasure of an ancestor, which is manifested by entrapping or

¹ *Tribal Studies*, i, pp. 165, 193, 224; ii, 7, 122, 319.

injuring a spider with which the man is associated. A priest is consulted, who will make an offering at the ancestral grave, and then search for and free the spider.¹

It is said that while the Kagoro believe in the reincarnation of ancestors into male or female children of their tribe, yet they do not enter into animals or into inanimate objects. But spirits of dead animals are thought to enter the bodies of children of hunters who have killed them, if the children have been conceived but not yet born at the time of the death of the animal. Proof of this is said to be shown when a child has been born with marks of wounds, similar to those received by its father when fighting with an animal shortly before the child's birth, or with the scars of wounds like those received by the dead animal itself.²

The Kwotto are divided into totem clans, descent in which is reckoned through males; most of the animals are wild ones. Members of the clan believe themselves to have intimate relationship with the totem animals, and notable members of the clan are thought to change into the totem animal at death. A sudden appearance of the animal, during the day or in a dream, is a sign of death. The clan members are called by the names of their totems. Members of the lion clan say that seven days after the first chief of this clan had died, a lion was seen standing on his grave. Other legends seek to explain the origin of the adoption of the totem animal, and the belief in the metamorphosis of chiefs and notabilities.

Vicious and ravaging animals are held to be witches, and evil men who have temporarily changed into animal form and are revenging themselves on their enemies. Thus a distinction is drawn between animals, some of which are respected as relatives, and others feared as were-animals. The Hausa and Fulani likewise believe in these were-animals, which are principally those which are most destructive and dangerous to man: lions, leopards, cheetahs, hyenas.³

Even peoples that today profess Muhammadanism are impregnated with the current ideas, that certain men or clans can change themselves into specified animals. The Hausa all are nominal Muslims, but they use a special word (*rikidda*) meaning "to turn into an animal".

In Hausa folklore there are numerous instances of men taking

¹ *Northern Tribes of Nigeria*, ii, pp. 180-185.

² *Tailed Head-Hunters of Nigeria*, pp. 173-174.

³ *Red Men of Nigeria*, pp. 150-159.

animal form: horse, scorpion, eagle, hawk, crow, frog, mouse, cat. A man may also, while preserving his own identity, assume the shape of an inanimate thing: ant-hill, stump, ring, or a part of the human body such as an eyebrow or the pupil of the eye.

Not only can men change themselves into animals, but the reverse may also happen and animals take upon themselves human flesh. Buffaloes, gazelles, snakes, pigeons and spiders may temporarily appear in human shape. The change usually has the aim of deceiving some person. A lion or a buffalo becomes a beautiful damsel, so as to lure the hunter into the bush and then destroy him. A snake becomes a handsome young man, so as to marry a finicky young woman who has declared that she will only marry a man whose body is without flaw. But sometimes the fables tell of benefits conferred by metamorphosis; a bird may take a girl's place and so save her life; or a boy turns into a horse, is sold by his brothers for profit, and then turns back into boy form and runs away from his new owner.

According to the Hausa, the person or animal who wishes to change shape has to roll on the earth, and human beings must take off all their clothing first. Charms or medicines are taken to assist the process of change.¹

Belief in metamorphosis has a very wide distribution in Africa, but there are many variations of the belief, and a number of them have not been traced in West Africa. In Rhodesia men take medicine to turn into wild animals, so as to hunt other animals and men. Only dangerous beasts are thus chosen, and a man may become several animals. The medicine is provided by a doctor, in the shape of worms from the flesh of the desired animals. The consultant swallows these worms, and the animal develops out of them. The person is thought to become an animal, and not to enter into an already existing animal.²

In West Africa, as far as we have been able to discover, men are not thought to be able to enter into several animals. Only rarely does it appear that animals can reverse the usual process, and possess human beings. Although a current idea of an "external soul" in animals is that men deposit their souls in an animal for safety, yet this conception is not manifest in West Africa. Indeed, instead of making for safety, such a practice would only double the chance of danger; for since injury to man or to animal is thought to affect the reciprocal,

¹ *Hausa Superstitions and Customs*, pp. 132 ff.

² *Ila-speaking Peoples*, ii, pp. 125-126.

the operation of metamorphosis is doubly dangerous, both to the body and to the soul of the man, since either may be injured during the separation and thus injure the other also. Normally the soul is thought to leave the man's body while he is asleep at night, or in a trance in the daytime.

It seems that the soul takes the likeness of an animal; more rarely does it appear that it possesses the body of an animal in the forest. It is not often thought that the body of the man is also metamorphosed. There is not much of the European and Asiatic belief in the power of magicians to change other people into animals against their will.

Witchcraft is one of the main sources of belief in metamorphosis, and this will be treated of in a later chapter, as far as it affects the human soul. But one wonders how far away we are from such beliefs ourselves. In a talk in the B.B.C. Home Service, in March 1947, mention was made of the superstition which still lingers in parts of England that witches can turn into hares. If the hare is shot with a silver bullet, the witch will be found to have died at the same time, though in another place, with a silver bullet in the same place as that in which the hare was shot!

The other main source for the belief in metamorphosis is the kinship of men with animals, in particular through their ancestors, and the totems of the clan. This is particularly so when the change of shape is innocuous; for when witches change into animals these are apparently often not totem animals. The totem animals are symbols of the continuing life of the ancestors, and although the ancestors are respected and their wants attended to, there is at root a not inconsiderable element of fear of these departed spirits.

Much has been written about the place of fear in African religion. The early tendency was to describe the whole life of the African as overshadowed by fear, of gods, demons, dead, and witches. A more recent view has reversed this picture, and tends to speak of the laughing African, much like Rousseau's innocent savage, leading a happy life until burdened with European government and morality. It may be interesting to quote the view of one of the most recent and competent anthropologists, as it has a special bearing upon animal symbolism in the ancestral cult.

"But what is the common psychological theme in these different categories of animal symbolism? The relations between men and their ancestors among the Tallensi are a never-ceasing

struggle. Men try to coerce and placate their ancestors by means of sacrifices. But the ancestors are unpredictable. . . . Like the animals of the bush and the river, they are restless, elusive, ubiquitous, unpredictable, aggressive. The relations of men with animals in the world of common-sense experience are an apt symbolism of the relations of men with their ancestors in the sphere of mystical causation.

"It is an interesting point that the commonest and most widely respected totem or quasi-totem animals are what Tallensi call 'teeth-bearers'—reptiles and carnivores, whose weapons are their teeth and who live and defend themselves by attacking other animals or even men. The symbolical link with the potential aggressiveness of the ancestors is patent. This is, no doubt, the chief reason why other species of earth-dwelling animals are not selected as Earth taboos.

"To sum up, animals are peculiarly apt symbols for the livingness—the immortality—of the ancestors as this emerges in the various functionally differentiated aspects of the social life. They symbolize, in particular, the potential aggressiveness of the ancestors as the supreme sanction of Tale cultural values."

† M. Fortes, *The Dynamics of Clanship Among The Tallensi*, p. 145.

CHAPTER 12

ANIMAL AND PLANT SOULS

IN dealing with the idea of metamorphosis of men into animal form, we have approached the question of the spiritual element which is believed to dwell in animals and plants. There is some degree of similarity in the African psychology of animals, compared with that of men, and this will be a convenient place to mention it.

It is not surprising that plants, as well as animals, should be thought to have a spiritual principle like man, when we consider the part played by tree symbolism in mythology which reveals the thoughts of our own ancestors. C. G. Jung says, "The tree of life is probably, first of all, a fruit-bearing tree, that is, a mother-image. Countless myths prove the derivation of man from trees; many myths show how the hero is enclosed in the maternal tree—thus dead Osiris in the column, Adonis in the myrtles. . . . Numerous female divinities were worshipped as trees, from which resulted the cult of the holy groves and trees." But male symbolism "also lies in the tree, even in the family tree, as is distinctly shown by the medieval family tree. From the first ancestor there grows upwards, in the place of the 'membrum virile', the trunk of a great tree. The bisexual character of the tree is intimated by the fact that in Latin trees have a masculine termination and a feminine gender. The feminine (especially the maternal) meaning of the forest and the phallic significance of trees in dreams is well known."¹

The thought of plants as being related to man, and animated by a spirit, is not confined to Africa. Even the Jews believed in this. There are sacred trees and oracles in the Old Testament. Philo attributed souls to trees, and in the Talmud trees groan and speak.²

Sir James Frazer says that in folk-tales the life of persons may be so bound up with the life of a plant, that when the plant withers the person will immediately die. Those who have had some special association with cleft trees are henceforth in kinship with the tree. There was an old English custom of passing rickety or ruptured children through a cleft ash tree;

¹ *Psychology of the Unconscious*, p. 137.

² Cf. Oesterley and Robinson, *Hebrew Religion*; Frazer, *Folk-Lore in the Old Testament*; Rappoport, *The Folklore of the Jews*, p. 36.

in Europe such children would be passed through cleft oaks. The disease was apparently thought to be left behind on the other side of the cleft tree. Similarly, people troubled by ghosts would creep through cleft trees or sticks. Men passed under the yoke of a chariot to cure skin diseases. A yoke or an arch was passed under during initiation rites. This may be the origin of the Roman ceremony of passing conquered enemies under a yoke; the triumphal arch under which victorious Roman soldiers passed may have been meant to protect them from the pursuit of the ghosts of their slain enemies, and purify them from the bloodshed.¹

LOWER GOLD COAST AND IVORY COAST

One of the commonest sights in West Africa is an arch, with uprights of poles or bamboos, and a cross-piece from which there often hangs a packet of "medicine" or a dying fowl. The entry to the place where sacred rites are to take place is protected by such an arch. Disease is thought to be prevented from going into a village where such an arch has been constructed. From the Ivory Coast to eastern Nigeria, and probably far beyond, such protective arches are found. The Yoruba call them by the appropriate name, "do not pry".

The Ashanti think that trees have a soul (*sunsum*), although it is often difficult to decide whether the soul, which may be propitiated by a priest, is the true soul of the tree, or is the spirit of some indwelling divinity or ancestor who is thought to have taken up his abode in the tree. Rattray tells of a priest who called his tree a shrine, and said that the spirit dwelt in its roots, but declared "I do not ever give offerings to the *sunsum* [soul] of the tree".²

Like animals, some trees are more powerful spiritually than others. Lesser trees have souls, but they are of little importance for they are not powerful for evil. The trees which have the most vindictive souls are those which are used for carving stools and drums. Hence before the woodcutter plies his axe, he places offerings before the tree in an endeavour to propitiate its soul. And after the stool and drums have been carved, the wandering soul of the tree, whose dwelling was destroyed when the tree was cut down, is enticed back into the stool and drums by rites of consecration. The drums become the home of the soul of the tree, and of the elephant whose ears have been used to form its membrane. During the national festivals

¹ *Balder the Beautiful*, pp. 168-195.

² *Religion and Art*, pp. 1-6.

(*adae*), the souls of the trees, the fibre, and the elephant, which have shared in the making of the drums, share in the lament which is made for dead kings.

In every Ashanti village there is a tree or trees (*gyadua*) in the street, whose soul was believed to protect the town. When a chief was chosen, he would stand in front of this tree and vow that if he did not care for the town and the tree, he would be guilty of blasphemy against the earth goddess. When a new part of the village was built, the chief would plant a tree there, and this would come to be regarded as a potential dwelling-place for the chief's spirit. When a chief died, the stool-keepers would break the branches of such trees; but if anyone cut a branch on normal occasions there would be a heavy fine imposed. The tree had white calico hung round it. If a branch blew down, the chief would lay a white cloth on it and sacrifice a sheep; nobody might use it for firewood. If such a tree fell down, a human sacrifice might have been made in the olden days; a funeral custom would be held for it as for a human being; mourning clothes and red funeral clay would be put on. If an enemy captured the town the newcomers would cut down the village tree, and when the inhabitants returned they would plant it again.

The village tree, therefore, is a *genius loci*. It may be the resting-place of ancestral spirits, gods, fairies and witches. It is said to have a soul, which keeps the town together. Men sit under its shade, and tell the traditional spider fables there. A proverb says, "The tree may stand in the street, but its roots are in the house".¹

Animals, of course, have souls, but they have no spirit (*'kra*). There does not seem to be any thought of their reincarnation, or development into human shape. Animals may be considered dangerous or harmless, according to the amount of soul-force with which they are credited. Quite small antelopes may be thought spiritually dangerous, while the savage bush cow is spiritually negligible; a connexion with totemism seems to be indicated. Great care is taken to prevent the pursuit of the hunter by the avenging ghost (*sasa*) of animals which have a powerful soul.

When an Ashanti hunter has killed a bongo, one of the animals whose dynamistic force is most powerful, he takes a liana which may be hanging over the path and splits it open. All the meat is passed through this aperture, three times for

¹ *Ashanti Law and Constitution*, pp. 213-214, 254.

a male and four times for a female, and then the liana is closed up again and spliced. There is a parallel to this in the "corpse door", in the wall of a hut or compound, which is closed up again after the corpse has been taken out.¹

The Gouro of the Ivory Coast believe that animals follow the same course as men. The souls of animal ancestors are reborn into newborn animals. As men have a ghost which haunts enemies, so animals have a ghost, and hunters take precautions to lay the ghosts of animals they have killed, so as not to be harmed by them. There is the belief in totem animals, whose flesh is tabu to their clan; the Mande use the word which is found in the northern Gold Coast (*ntana*, *sone* in Gouro).²

The Kulango believe that animals have souls like men. Vegetables, and even minerals, have souls. The animal souls, like those of human beings, go underground after death. But they can also flit about in the air, and pursue men, as ghosts. Hunters often complain of being persecuted by the ghost of an animal that they have killed. There is a strange belief that wild animals live in herds and are led by invisible shepherds, spirits that care for them as human shepherds tend domestic animals.³

UPPER GOLD COAST, UPPER IVORY COAST, SUDAN

Some of the Nankanse offer sacrifices to the spirits of departed animals, if so instructed by the diviner. These sacrifices are offered periodically, and consist of fowls and water. To the objection that cows do not eat fowls during their terrestrial life, the Nankanse answer that their souls will eat the soul of the offering, and add that in their tribe women also do not eat fowls while alive, these being reserved for the superior male, but after death fowls are offered to female spirits.

Other similar tribes, such as the Nunuma, insist on the kinship of men with animals. Each man has a cayman affinity which resembles him. If the cayman loses an eye or a leg, the man becomes blind or lame also, and vice versa. When the cayman dies it comes to the man's compound, and is buried in a white cloth; a sacrifice of a fowl is made, and then the man dies also.⁴

The Mossi and Fulse believe that animals have spiritual properties like men, souls and even spirits. This must be so, they say, since animals are killed to accompany dead chiefs,

¹ *Religion and Art*, p. 183.

² *Nègres Gouro et Gagou*, pp. 204, 256.

³ *Le Noir de Bondoukou*, p. 197.

⁴ *Le Noir du Soudan*, pp. 193, 272.

and so must have souls which survive death like those of their masters. Some even maintain that there are evil animal geniuses, as there are evil geniuses in human form, who seduce women; so the evil animal spirits seduce female animals. Plants also have a vegetative soul.¹

We have referred to the close connexion which the Tallensi make between animals and ancestors, whom they symbolize effectively because of their aggressive and unpredictable character. There is also a close connexion between animals and the Earth. The Earth is regarded with awe by these northern peoples, and they speak of it as a "living thing", because it seems to intervene in human life just as do ancestral spirits. The Earth punishes sacrilege, and it is a symbol of life-giving forces. The totem animals are "the people of the Earth", symbolizing the forces of the Earth as they intervene for good or ill in human life.²

The Bambara think that animals have a soul and even a spirit, like men, and apparently believe that these souls can reincarnate. Animals and plants often seem to have a more powerful, because more mysterious, soul than men and to approach the category of divinity. It is difficult to draw a dividing line between the soul of a tree, and that of a spirit which may indwell it.

The spirit (*nyama*) always means something powerful. Some animals have a more powerful spirit than others, and birds are feared most of all. They are thought to give convulsions to children and to make their hands and feet curl up like birds' feet. Children wear charms round their necks against the spirits of birds, especially at the time when they are building their nests and seem to be particularly well-nourished.

The Bambara, like the Gouro and other tribes of the Ivory Coast, fear the pursuing ghost of an animal killed in the hunt, especially antelopes, leopards, elephants, and pythons. The hunter believes that he may be pursued by the ghost of the beast that he has killed, and makes a sacrifice to it, or finds an old hunter who rids him of the ghost by means of medicine. These powerful animals have doubtless sacred and totemistic connexions.

Some animals, such as toads, are considered in certain Bambara villages to be inhabited by ancestral spirits. They are said to croak when the village chief is about to die. They act

¹ *Le Noir du Yatenga*, pp. 385-386.

² *Dynamics of Clanship*, pp. 142-143, 176.

as protecting spirits to the village, the bonds or "ties" against all evil that may come. Other animals are worshipped as divinities, or as associated with a secret society, such as the much feared hyena society.

Certain trees and plants are considered by the Bambara to have powerful souls, and to be the dwelling places of divine spirits. There are trees which are protectors of women and girls, called "women's trees", and which play an important part in the ceremonies of excision of adolescent girls. Every village has a sacred tree, called "tie mouth", whose function is to tie the mouths of evil spirits and harmful influences. The tree is supposed to act as a gag, to protect men and dwellings against all evil. There is often an associated animal, called "tie animal", generally a goat, though it may be an ass, a snake, a lizard or a rat. These animals are like living and mobile symbols of the force of the tree. An annual sacrifice is made to the village tree, in the hot dry season in the early part of the year. The village chief orders the preparation by each family of fowls, goats, millet and kola nuts. These offerings are presented to the tree, and the flesh eaten by the participants. Sacrifices are made to the tree on individual occasions, by persons or families.

When a new village is founded, the tree to be chosen is indicated by the diviner, who seeks guidance from the gods. While the village is being built, meals are cooked under the chosen tree and eaten there, while weapons and tools are hung from its branches. The word for the "tie mouth" tree may be connected with the idea of tying the spirit to the place, and the family cult.¹

TOGO, DAHOMEY, SOUTHERN NIGERIA

In Togoland, animals and trees are believed to have souls, resembling the personal souls of man. They have feelings and are thought to speak. They may be the abode of a spirit like man or the gods, but it is often the soul of the tree itself which is believed to speak. Some of the Dagomba, in the north, have a legend of a chief who used to ride about on a deer, and even now when the chief of that village is dying, a ghost deer is said to come to the town ready saddled to receive its rider, and to wait outside the chief's house.²

¹ *La Religion Bambara*, pp. 14, 156-165, 195-208. The Bobo have funeral rites for sacred trees; cf. Cremer, *Les Bobo*, iv, pp. 34-35.

² *Tales told in Togoland*, pp. 35-36.

The Akposso and Ewe think that animals such as leopards and pythons have powerful souls, which need propitiating by one who happens to kill them, and are buried with funeral honours like men. In Dahomey the Loko (*iroko*) tree is a divinity, worshipped by priests and devotees, with its temples and shrines. The python (*dāngbe*) is also very popular as a divinity, particularly in river and lagoon villages.

The Ewe believe that animals have a soul (*ye*), which is part of the divine energy, but they have no spirit like man (*se*). Trees and rocks and streams have their indwelling spiritual force, but the spirit of a rock or river may be respected chiefly because of some traditional connexion with a god who is believed to have revealed himself there.

Trees which are felled have to have their souls quietened, like slain animals; before cutting the tree the woodcutter will ask its pardon with an offering. The souls of trees are thought to be like giants, and unpleasant in appearance; sometimes tree souls are believed to appear in the form of snakes—the fact that snakes often have their holes in the foot of trees serves to confirm this belief. The conjunction of tree and snake is known far beyond Africa.

Ewe and Yoruba villages have their village trees, as do the Pila and Bariba tribes to the north. These are often ficus or baobab, and are frequently girdled with lengths of woven cotton cloth; there may be nails fixed in their trunks or tiny bells suspended from them. It is still remembered by the old men that tradition tells of the ravaging of Abomey by the troops of Oyo, over a century ago, and all the sacred trees were cut down by the invaders; to be replanted on liberation in the public places.

An assimilation of the souls of trees to those of men may be traced in the circumlocutions used when a prince or a king dies: "a branch has fallen", "a mighty tree has been uprooted". The tree is associated with birth; a childless mother will pray for babies among the trees; when the umbilical cord of a baby is cut off it is buried under a palm-tree. This "*palmier du nombril*", as Le Hérissé calls it, is henceforth in close relationship to the child; offerings will be made to it, in childhood by his parents but later by himself; but the identity of the tree will be kept secret lest anyone, in harming the tree, injure the child as well.

The palm nuts used in the divining operation of Ifa are said to have a soul of their own. This is different from the divine

spirit Ifa, who acts as messenger and oracle of the gods and who is only directly present when the divining work is going on but retires when it is finished. The soul of the divining nuts remains with them, in the bag and calabash kept by their owner. When the human owner dies his Ifa symbols are destroyed. The soul of the nuts is thought to go to God, if they are buried. But if they are thrown into the bush, the soul stays by them until their final dissolution, by the elements or by wild animals; after which destruction of the external body, the soul of the nuts returns to God.

The Ibibio are said to believe not only that animals have souls, but that these souls can be projected at times, as those of men can also. A leopard may send out its soul if it is suspicious of the bait set by a hunter; if the hunter shoots at the soul the leopard is warned and returns to the bush. This explains many bad shots. The souls of dead animals, killed in funeral rites, are believed to appear on sacred days near to the graves of those whose spirits they had accompanied. Similarly, animals killed to guard holy places are thought to do so by their souls. In like manner, the souls of trees, planted at the entrance to villages, are thought to protect the inhabitants and repel enemies; they are called "trees which can stop folk", and they sway and moan if enemies approach, while the sound as of an army is heard in the branches. One is reminded of the "sound of marching in the tops of the mulberry trees" (in 2 Samuel 5: 24).¹

NORTHERN NIGERIA

The Jukun not only perform rites to allay the avenging ghosts of men who have been killed, but also those of animals who have met their death accidentally or by design. The ghost of the lion has to be laid, not only because it is a dangerous beast, but because the lion is the counterpart of the king. If a leopard is killed, the hunter has to be secluded for three days, and fumigated to prevent attack by the ghostly force of the dead beast, also a relative of the king. Mourning ceremonies are also carried out. The ghosts of certain birds, such as the crested crane and the vulture, must be propitiated; otherwise their slayer will cry out like the crane, or cough like the vulture, and then die.

Trees that are cut down to make canoes, are propitiated by the Jukun to prevent the vengeance of their ghost. A cloth is

¹ *Life in Southern Nigeria*, pp. 110-112.

tied round the trunk, and offerings made of porridge and beer; the ancestors are invoked, and a request is made that if a spirit lives in the tree it will go in peace and leave the tree to the woodcutter.¹

The Tagwai of Janga have a leopard totem, which is said to warn members of the clan of the approach of death. If a leopard is killed, or even looked at, the ghost of the beast is thought to pursue the unfortunate mortal, and afflict him with violent coughing. A man suffering like this is put in a white cloth like a shroud, and a hunter performs rites accompanied by songs. The leopard's spots are supposed to appear on the cloth, and the hunter plucks them out and so saves the man's life. If the spots do not come, it is said, he will die.

The Jen fear the avenging ghost of the hare, and women and children are not permitted to eat its flesh. If a dog kills a hare, a small boy is charged with it, to protect the dog from the hare's ghost. The hare's skin is used as a protective charm against fire; the older men eat the cooked flesh, for the hare is said to be the wisest of animals and his flesh should be eaten only by wise men. The bones are taken, at a run, and cast into a river; anyone stumbling during this run is said to have been tripped up by the hare's ghost. The hare is a well-known figure in West African folk-tales, the original of Brer Rabbit.

The Bolewa, of Bornu province, think that animal ghosts can possess human beings. The leopard is particularly feared for this, and rites are performed to lay its ghost. If the hunter dares to eat its flesh, he roasts it behind his back, and drinks a protective potion as soon as he eats the meat.²

Some of the Kagoro say that animals have no souls, although departed human spirits apparently have the use of horses and dogs for the pursuit of their own pleasures in the after-world. Others say that animals have souls of the same size and shape as their mortal bodies. Animals have special psychic powers, and can see departed souls, which are invisible to ordinary men.³

The Kwotto fear all the larger animals, of their own and other clans, because of their spiritual forces, and perform rites to lay their ghosts. These rites seek to protect man from the vengeance of the animal killed. If a hunter kills a lion, he first reports it to the chief, and takes a present to ask pardon for having killed the chief's kinsman. The chief returns presents

¹ *Sudanese Kingdom*, p. 204.

² *Tribal Studies*, ii, pp. 273, 304, 523.

³ *Tailed Head-Hunters*, pp. 170-172.

of notability, a gown and a turban, perhaps because the hunter is now filled with the influence of the royal beast. The lion is buried, being saluted as "grandfather", and the hunter prays to it not to harm him, saying that he offers refreshment so that the beast's spiritual power may not cause him to die. The hunter has to be purified from this dynamism, in seclusion for two more days. Sometimes part of the flesh of the slain animal is eaten, doubtless to increase strength. Similarly certain trees may not be cut down without propitiation, and in former days neglect of this precaution was punishable with death.¹

On the other side of the continent, it is said that the Ba-ila call some animals and birds "persons"; for they are quasi-personal, and have "shadow-souls" like men, but they are not reincarnated after death. Certain animals must be propitiated to avert their avenging ghost. The hunter jumps through a cleft stick, as a murderer does; if this were not done the ghost of the eland or elephant killed would horn him at night.²

Most interesting, for comparison with the beliefs of the Ewe referred to above, are certain practices of the Baganda. Some of the clans took the umbilical cord of a newborn child and inserted it in the core of a banana tree, having cut off the top just below the spot where the leaves branch out. If the core of the tree sprouted during the night, so that the cord had come out, this was regarded as proof that the child was a member of the clan. The afterbirth of the child was called the "second child", and was thought to have a spirit which immediately became a ghost. The afterbirth was buried at the foot of a plantain, which was then guarded to prevent anyone from eating food or drinking beer from it, and thus taking the spirit from the clan. Only grandparents could eat and drink from this tree with impunity. This is like the "*palmier du nombril*" of the Ewe.³

Animals and plants, then, have spiritual forces associated with them, akin to but generally lower in grade than those of man. Father Tempels expresses the position by means of his philosophy of forces. "Man is not suspended in the void; he lives on his land, he is found there as sovereign vital force, reigning over the soil and all that lives on it: man, animal or plant. . . . This explains what the black people meant in protesting against the nomination of a chief, on the intervention

¹ *Red Men*, pp. 153, 167-174.

² *Ila-speaking Peoples*, ii, 87.

³ *The Baganda*, pp. 54-55, 62-63.

of the administration, when this man could not, by his rank and his power of life, be the link joining the dead to the living. 'It is not possible for such a one to be chief. That cannot be done. Nothing will grow any more on our soil, the women will bear no more children, and all will be smitten with sterility.' . . .

"After the class of *human forces* come the other forces, those of animals, those of vegetables, and those of minerals. But in the midst of each of those classes is to be found a hierarchy according to the vital power, the rank, or the primogeniture. . . . A human group or an animal species may occupy in their respective classes a rank relatively equal or relatively different. The respect for this rank of life, the care not to place oneself higher than one is or to keep in one's place, the necessity of not pushing up against superior forces as if they were equal, all this may furnish the key to the much disputed problem of 'taboo' and 'totem'."¹

This author insists that inanimate objects cannot exercise their vital influence, by themselves, upon forces that are higher up in the hierarchy. He does not apply this to animals, who may be considered at times to be almost blood-brothers, to men and chiefs. But he admits that inanimate things may be thought of as dwelling-places of a higher power, an ancestral spirit, in which case the influence would be correspondingly greater. But normally "these inferior beings do not exercise their influence by themselves, but by the vital energy of a superior force acting as cause."

¹ *Op. cit.*, pp. 42-44.

INJURY TO THE SOUL

THE study of metamorphosis revealed the belief that certain men can change or transfer their soul into animal form. This power is thought to be exercised in an evil fashion by witches. The souls of witches are thought to wander about at night, seeking whom they may devour. They are believed to prey on, and to "eat" the spirits of their victims.

It is to the adventures of these evil souls, and the fate of the spiritual faculties of their victims, that we now turn. Reference was made to witchcraft in *West African Religion*, but the subject is of great importance, the incidence increasing rather than diminishing in West Africa, and we shall treat of it here particularly as regards the soul.

What actually occurs in witchcraft has long been in dispute. Whether witches are cannibalistic in reality, or were so in the past, or whether they do actually meet. There seems to be increasing evidence that the whole thing is, at present, a product of the imagination, an obsessional neurosis.

It is curious to find a modern writer maintaining that witches did meet, in Europe, and devour tender babes. Montague Summers, in his *History of Witchcraft and Demonology* (1926), maintains that "there is ample and continuous evidence that children, usually tender babes who were as yet unbaptized, were sacrificed at the Sabbat. . . . Sometimes they ate tender flesh of little children, who had been slain and roasted at some Synagogue, and sometimes babes were brought there, yet alive, whom the witches had kidnapped from their homes if opportunity offered." All the evidence quoted is from past centuries in Europe, with uncritical acceptance of the tales of medieval writers.

Even less scientific is this author's approach to the problem of the bodily or mental departure of witches to the Sabbat. He quotes the ancient *Compendium Maleficarum*, as saying that "The opinion which many who follow Luther and Melancthon hold is that witches only assist at these assemblies in their imagination, and that they are choused by some trick of the devil, in support of which argument the objectors assert that the witches have very often been seen lying in one spot and not moving thence". Yet Summers quotes a case from the

Malleus Maleficarum (of 1489), in which "a woman who had voluntarily surrendered herself to be examined as being a witch, confessed to the Dominican fathers that she nightly assisted at the Sabbat, and that neither bolts nor bars could prevent her from flying to the infernal revels. Accordingly she was shut fast under lock and key in a chamber whence it was impossible for her to escape, and all the while carefully watched by lynx-eyed officers through a secret soupirail. These reported that immediately the door was closed she threw herself on the bed where in a moment she was stretched out perfectly rigid in all her members. Select members of the tribunal, grave and acute doctors, entered the room. They shook her, gently at first, but presently with considerable roughness. She remained immobile and insensible. She was pinched and pulled sharply. At last a lighted candle was brought and placed near her naked foot until the flesh was actually scorched in the flame. She lay stockish and still, dumb and motionless as a stone. After a while her senses returned to her. She sat up and related in exact detail the happenings at the Sabbat she had attended, the place, the number of the company, the rites, what was spoken, all that was done, and then she complained of a hurt upon her foot."

Yet, in spite of this ancient evidence, and of much more since then, Summers prefers the opinion of "Master Jurisprudists", and declares roundly, in the present tense, "The conclusion then is plain and proven. The witches do actually and individually attend the Sabbat, an orgy of blasphemy and obscenity." He identifies modern spiritualism with witchcraft.¹

Nevertheless, it has been long recognized that, in its later forms at least, European witchcraft was largely imaginary. Miss Margaret Murray has maintained that witchcraft was originally a prehistoric fertility cult, which opposed Christianity, and long survived in Europe. In Africa, its origins may have been similarly dark, but many of its modern manifestations appear to be imaginary.

In his important work on witchcraft in East Africa, Dr. Evans-Pritchard discusses the question as to whether, among the Azande tribe, witches are conscious agents. Remarking upon the phenomenon of confession of witchcraft found in records of European witches in the past, he says, "I have only received cases of confession from one Zande, Kisanga, the cleverest, but perhaps the least reliable of my informants".

¹ *Op. cit.*, pp. 128 ff., 160.

We shall see that this is different from West Africa, where people often confess, under pressure, to having devoured the souls of their fellows. But the question as to whether they are conscious of committing such evil deeds may be judged by similar criteria in the two areas. For the Azande also believe that witches must know their condition, and act in full consciousness; since they think that witches indulge in secret orgies, and meet with other witches, boasting together of their misdeeds. But they are inconsistent in their attitude, for if a Zande is accused of witchcraft he pleads innocence, at least of evil intention. He thinks that his case must be exceptional, for while it is taken for granted that other witches are conscious of their actions, yet he himself, having no such consciousness, feels that he must be an extraordinary witch, since he does not recognize others and has no secret understandings with them.¹

In West Africa, however, a woman may confess to witchcraft not because she has any conscious understanding with other witches, but perhaps largely because of the suggestion of society, and also by the influence of dreams wherein she may have thought evil about others and done them harm unconsciously.

LOWER GOLD COAST AND IVORY COAST

The Akan believe that witches can change themselves into other shapes: animals, snakes, trees. The witch is said to give off a glowing light in the night, as it flits about among trees and houses, and during the day a red aura distinguishes it. Some call the witches "spirits". They may come from the "skies", i.e. be born as witch-children. Or the power may be received from someone else, a dying witch. It is the personal soul (*sunsum*) of the witch which leaves the body and feeds on the spirit (*'kra*) of the victim, and thus destroys the guardian spiritual power of the sufferer.

Witches are thought to use various methods for destroying those upon whom they prey. They may suck the blood from the victim; or the whole body may be stolen and taken to the witches' coven. There it is eaten piece by piece, while the person sickens; the heart is devoured last and then the man dies. Witches are held responsible for fatal accidents, such as falling trees which kill men, bursting guns, and many diseases. The witch's pot, his chief possession, is said to contain, among other ingredients, parts of the human body, blood, and a human

¹ *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande*, 1937, pp. 118 ff.

heart. These pots are said to be hidden in trees or in the witch's stomach. The mixture of fantastic and feasible seems to trouble nobody. When a witch is convicted the pot must be surrendered; but there are many pots at home and in the bush, and one does not meet with tangible evidence of these gruesome contents supposedly kept in the witch's pot.¹

The most detailed study of witchcraft, in West Africa, is that given by Dr. Field. The Gã, she says, declare that it is the witch's soul (*susuma*) which quits the body during sleep, and joins with other witches in eating the spirits (*kla*) of their victims. The spirit is known to be invisible, but it is thought of as having human shape, with arms and legs which are cut up and shared among the assembly. The victim sickens while this is in progress, but if the witches relent they may give back part of the spirit, weakness remaining attached to the members already devoured spiritually. An unborn child whose spirit is stolen will be stillborn; the high infant mortality finds a facile explanation.

Stealing the spirit of another is believed to add years to one's own life. This seems to be the reason why old people, particularly old women, are so often suspected of witchcraft. They have stolen someone else's life, and added it on to their own. In like fashion, great prosperity comes from destroying the spiritual forces in a neighbour's fruit and grain, or adding them on to one's own. It does not pay to be outstandingly rich, or unusually old, when the accusation of witchcraft is always a ready tool for the jealous or the unfortunate.

Other persons than witches are thought to be able to injure their enemies, through the offices of a worker of black magic. This practitioner gazes into a bowl of water and evokes the spirit of the enemy, stabbing it through the spiritual heart when it appears, or tying it into a bundle.

Dr. Field insists that although witchcraft may sound like simple cannibalism, yet this is only a figure of speech. Only the spirit of the victim is "eaten". Even the relatives of one who has died under the supposed influence of witchcraft agree that his physical body was uninjured, except by disease, and was not disturbed in its grave. The eating of the spirit is not physical. Nor does the assembly of the witches appear to be physical either; at least there is no convincing evidence of this. It is agreed that the witch's body remains asleep in her hut, watched over by her spirit, which maintains life and breathing.

¹ *Africa*, vol. viii, p. 553.

But her soul is believed to have gone away to the coven, flying in bird or animal form. This "flying" can only be seen if you have the right sort of eyes. But where dream is held to be actual fact, how can one deny that the soul really does travel about at night? Some witches are imagined to travel to their revels on the backs of animals: antelopes, leopards, snakes. Snakes, in particular, are regarded as familiars, witches turning themselves into serpents, supposedly hiding snakes in their private parts during the day (unconscious symbolism). Cases are quoted in which witches are said to have produced tamed bush animals, which were their familiars.

Whether it be fact or fiction, most West African witches believe that they do meet in company, and confess to have done so. These confessions are strange affairs, and confuse the issue considerably for western minds which cannot conceive of confessing to something of which one is innocent in waking life. A parallel might be drawn from Russian trials, where the accused all seem to have made full confession, after first maintaining innocence. There is a very strong sense of society, and a considerable power of suggestion. Besides, who knows what may be done during sleep, even unknowingly and unwillingly?

The victim of witchcraft is treated by a "witch-doctor", one who himself has second sight, and can recognize witches. This man himself possesses a dangerous power, because it may easily turn into evil in his hands; he must have a strong spirit to control it. If the witch is caught, she may be forced to give assistance in curing the victim. This is supposed to be achieved by reassembling the spiritual components of the sufferer. The doctor keeps him quiet, shaves his head, and gives water to drink in quantity. There are supposed to be snakes and worms crawling about inside him (perhaps many worms in reality), and lights float in front of his eyes. As the cure proceeds, these worms leave the body, and the soul and spirit are fortified.¹

In the Ivory Coast, the Adjukru believe that witches cannot harm the personal soul of a man. But witches are said to eat human flesh, and to have the power of taking away the spirit of a man, or of hanging it from the top of a tree. The person whose injury is thus desired will die suddenly, if his spirit is not restored to him. There are tales current of a witch whose soul was absent and, being attacked by another soul, the witch himself died at the same moment where he lay in his hut some

¹ *Religion and Medicine of the Gã*, pp. 93, 135-159.

distance away. The soul of the witch prowls about, in animal and other guise, in search of human prey.

The neighbouring Dida, I have been told, believe that witches change their souls into animals or flies, in order to work harm on others and devour them. When a person falls ill, either an adult or a child, he is surrounded by people who tell him to confess his sins. If he admits that he is a witch and has eaten human flesh, he is taken to a doctor who treats him for this, and who often heals him of his mental and physical sickness. By such confession, those who have the faculty of becoming invisible are made known.

The Gagou and Gouro believe that witches can change into leopards; or that their victims are turned into cattle, sheep and goats, on which the were-leopards prey. The bodily shell of the victim only survives this attack for a short while, and eventually dies when the soul is fully consumed. Such a soul cannot be reborn on earth.¹

Further to the west, in Liberia, witches are said to practise their arts at night; they strip naked and visit the huts of their chosen victims. They are believed to dance on the graves of past victims who have died as a result of their bewitching influence. Several of the secret societies, while also associated with the cults of the dead, have as a principal aim the seeking out of witches.

Further west still, the Mende of Sierra Leone believe that one is not born a witch, but becomes one by some power entering into the person. Witches leave their bodies in sleep, and go about the town, distributing disease to all and sundry. If a newborn baby is left alone in the hut, and is seen by a witch, he puts something in its mouth which descends to the stomach. If the baby does not die, it grows up a witch. If a man dreams of brushing his eyes, and his eye is sore in the morning, that is attributed to the maleficent activity of a witch, as is any disease that is hard to cure. The Temne say that witches have four eyes, of which the second pair see more than ordinary mortals see, being spiritual eyes, and having the ability to see in the dark. The witches have witch-sticks with which to flog people, and witch-guns to kill them; they are thought to bring disease and lack of fertility into the fields and help their owners, by means of these spiritual weapons.²

¹ *Nègres Gouro et Gagou*, pp. 143, 181.

² Curley and Turi, *loc. cit.*

UPPER GOLD COAST, UPPER IVORY COAST, SUDAN

The Nankanse believe that some persons have the power of "owning" other souls. A man who by his own might has killed another, who otherwise would still be alive till his appointed time, is an "owner of *tobega*". When this murderer dies, his son will go with the others who have a like power, towards the village where the victim used to live. There they will cast away his belongings, so that the spirit of the victim may finally depart to the world beyond, because his owner is no longer living.

Others than witches are believed to have the power of second sight, and can "fly" about at night. Perhaps this is a deduction from dreams about flying, so common to many races of mankind. But these night fliers are harmless, do not eat souls, and may help in smelling out witches.

Witches are believed only to be able to destroy their own relatives. A witch will turn its victim's soul into an animal, domestic or wild, and the animal is then killed and eaten; while the body of the victim sickens and dies. Only the witches can see this meat which is eaten, while to ordinary people the witches appear to be feeding from empty plates. When a witch dies he is said to become a pursuing ghost, or else to turn into a snake or some other dangerous animal and bite men.¹

The Kassouna, of the upper Ivory Coast, say that witches drink the blood or eat the souls of men. If a person suffers from large boils, or from nails which are said to come out all over the body, then it is believed that a witch is sucking his blood. The witch takes the soul, and hits it on the ground until it becomes a cow, still invisible to normal men. Then this cow is eaten by the assembled witches, while its soul-owner dies.

Witches are hereditary if they are women, but not necessarily so if they are male. They are most frequently old women. A dead witch changes into a leopard. Living witches are said to go about as hyenas or vipers, or to fly as balls of fire. If there is a sick man in the compound, whose illness is caused by a witch in the clan, then balls of fire will be seen flying about there at night. The Mossi also think that witches eat the personal soul of man (*siga*), as it wanders about in dreams.²

The Bambara believe the female witch to be more numerous than the male, and her action to be restricted to her relatives. It is the soul of the victim that is eaten at the witches' banquet.

¹ *Tribes of the Ashanti Hinterland*, pp. 204, 298.

² *Le Noir du Soudan*, pp. 317-318.

INJURY TO THE SOUL

But the witch is thought first to change the victim's soul into a cow; then the cow is killed and the body is eaten gradually. While the soul is in process of consumption, the body of the victim sickens, and when the spiritual counterpart of the head is eaten he dies.

Special charms are used to catch souls: human skulls, the skull of a hare, hands, toes, pubic hairs. Religious societies have the duty of discovering these charms and unmasking the witches. Witches are said to be discoverable by their ability to lay eggs.

M. Monteil speaks of the witch as an evil spirit which incarnates in certain persons, men or women, and forces them to eat the souls of other people, this being done to nourish the spirit, through the person it possesses. This would explain how a person may be a witch unconsciously, as well as involuntarily. The evil spirit is always on the prowl for human souls to devour. All people possessed by this evil spirit are called *suba*, the Bambara word for witch. There are also voluntary witches, great criminals who can leave their bodies to assist at the nocturnal meetings. But other writers consider that this identification of witchcraft with evil spirits confuses the issue, and is based upon a misapprehension.

Both Bambara and other West African tribes do consider witches sometimes to be possessed. An evil spirit takes charge of them and obliges them to do harm to others, to lay spells on them, which may amount to much the same thing as devouring them. Among the Agni of the Ivory Coast, when a man is accused of witchcraft he may be given an offering to take into the forest, in order that the evil spirit that possessed him may be induced to release his tool. But normally, both Ivory Coast and Bambara tribes consider most witches to be responsible for their own actions, and to enjoy their nocturnal meals. The word for witch means a "thrower" of spells, and the spirit of the victim is thought to be "bound" by the witch. The victim being thus bound loses his vital force, and the witch increases his own force by his vampirism.¹

TOGO AND DAHOMEY

Some of the Togolese people believe that witches ride about on the backs of animals, turn into animal form, or fly about in the air. They have the power of disappearing and making themselves invisible to those who have not special eyes; some say that they go about upside down with their feet in the air.

¹ *Religion Bambara*, pp. 43-71; *Bambara de Ségou*, p. 348.

Many other tribes think that witches' feet are turned with the toes backwards, like those of fairies; yet all this is in the witch's spiritual body. Witches are supposed to hypnotize those whom they attack, and to suck their blood. They are imagined to take unborn children out of their mothers' wombs, and put them back dead. They extract the invisible essence out of food offered to spirits for sacrifice; they blight crops so that men cannot prosper.

The Ewe believe that it is the spirit that is stolen by the witches. Some make it more subtle and say that it is the shadow, or even the footprint whose essence is taken by the witch. It is generally agreed that the spiritual faculties are not all removed.

The spirit is also injured by black magicians. Such an evil-doer will go to the roadside with certain powders, oil, and kolas. The magician will wash his eyes with water and leaves. The spirit of the victim is then materialized, and beans are offered to it to obtain its favour and consent. If it refuses to accept the gift it must be allowed to go away; otherwise the operation will be dangerous for the magician. If it accepts the gift, then the magical preparations directed against the victim will be able to attack him. Sometimes the spirits are called up into bowls of water, or plates, where they can be seen and spoken to. But the person whose spirit is thus called up knows nothing of the happening.¹

It is believed that the soul of a dead man may be captured before it ascends to report to God on its deeds in the body. This is a very dangerous undertaking. Those who are successful, however, may nail the soul to a tree, or else attach them to their persons in a ring. Some magicians have several of these souls held captive. They become the tools of the wizard, after having been propitiated and thus subdued, and they are sent out on evil errands by the magician. Shortly before the latter dies, these souls are released and go at last to God. This is the personal soul (*ye*), but normally it is thought that the spirit (*se*, *lindō*) is the only part of the man that can be captured by witches.

It is not believed that witches eat human flesh, but that they change the spiritual heart, liver, intestines, and blood of their victim into some animal or vegetable form, e.g. goat, pig, kola. These become a great quantity, even from the heart of a single person, and the witches then regale themselves, while their victims languish and expire.

¹ *La Géomancie*, pp. 380-397.

INJURY TO THE SOUL

A converted Gū witch assured me that he and his companions met in broad daylight, but invisibly to ordinary mortals. A discussion would take place as to who had offended members of the society, and the case would be weighed and judged. If the person was condemned, he would be killed and shared out among the company. But sometimes there are those who defend the accused, and ask the chief witch to accept in his place meat or money. These more tender-hearted witches belong to the assembly, but do not share in the flesh of the victims.

SOUTHERN NIGERIA

The Yoruba believe that witches change into animals, especially fowls and birds; old women change into shrieking "witchcraft" birds. They fly through the air to their coven in the bush, and there devour their victims. They attach themselves to people and suck their blood invisibly. They send nightmares to sleeping men, and may use the great Shigidi evil charm to kill them. But they cannot injure those whose spirit is strong, and have to find a weak spot through which to enter their victim. They cannot be recognized by ordinary men; but there are supposed to be medicines which can be put on the eyes, so that the eyes are opened to invisible things and witches can be clearly distinguished.

Those who prosper unduly, acquiring plenty of property and large sums of money without having apparently toiled unduly, are believed to have ill-gotten gains. It is said that they have found the secret hiding-places which men make for their money, and have stolen the lucre when in their invisible soul-form.

The Ibo believe strongly in witches, and think that they are chiefly women. They are held to devour unborn children, and only leave the foot, which is all that is finally delivered. How many midwives may be suspected of witchcraft, if something goes wrong with the delivery and the child dies? Witches are said often to take the spirit of their own child to their gathering, and when the child dies shortly after he may call out his mother's name in proof of this. The witches are believed to be able to change into the shape of animals: crocodiles, leopards, wild cows, snakes, goats, fishes. If any of these animals bite a man he will die; and if the animal is wounded in the struggle with the hunter, a wound will appear in the same place on the witch's body.

The Aro think that the soul is removed by witches when the victim is bathing. They can exercise their evil influence from

a distance; but some say that they cannot harm a good man, or a European. The witches may change into rats, pigs, or fowls. They may bite people when in this animal form, and the wound will be incurable, will fester and swell and finally kill the sufferer. Witches are believed to be very tall, in their soul-body, or to become lame and crooked. They can only be seen by means of special medicine.¹

Semi-Bantu, like the Ibibio, think that witches turn into rats, lizards, flies, or perch on roofs like owls. They suck men's blood, either from a distance, or else through the intermediary of small animals. The witches trap the souls of those who wander during sleep, says Talbot. Some evil priests even by day endeavour to entrap the souls of their enemies; they are said to make a cut in a plantain tree, and to call upon the name of their victim continually until the trunk of the tree swells up; then the place is bound round with cord and at sunset it is slashed through. The soul is believed to have been caught in the plantain, and its owner will die when the tree crashes to earth. A witch-doctor is consulted by a man who feels his soul to be attacked, and he endeavours to induce the soul of the witch to enter a bowl of water, presenting to it various offerings, such as fowls, rice, plantains. When the water begins to move, the bowl is tied up with new rope to hold the imprisoned witch-soul. The soul of man is believed to pass out through his nostrils, and these are blocked up if one is suspected of witchcraft, lest the spirit returns to steal the organs of the body for evil deeds.²

The Mbembe, who greatly fear witches, cut open the corpse of a suspected witch, and endeavour to find the centre of the witch's power, which is in the heart and the head; a small being like a bat is said to be extracted. Or a long-beaked bird may be looked for in the abdomen. The internal animals are used to kill unborn children in their mother's womb, or they may stop conception altogether.³

NORTHERN NIGERIA

The Nupe believe that witchcraft makes people invisible, separates the spirit from the body, and consists in eating other souls. The personal "shadow-soul" may normally be separated from the body during sleep; witches perform this separation

¹ *Peoples of Southern Nigeria*, ii, pp. 213-222.

² *Life in Southern Nigeria*, pp. 120-122.

³ *Peoples of Southern Nigeria*, loc. cit.

INJURY TO THE SOUL

by themselves and send out their soul to give evil dreams to others, and to "eat" their "life-soul" or spirit. The body of the witch is asleep at home while this predatory action is going on; even if the body of the witch were awakened, in an endeavour to find out if she were really absent, the soul would return to the body at once. Sometimes it is believed that witches, especially males, do not send out their own soul, but use the spirit of another person which they have captured to perform their evil deeds.

Witches are supposed to have nocturnal meetings, to be organized into an "order", and to flit about in various forms. The witch is assumed to have conscious intention of witchcraft, and must admit this under accusation. If she does not admit it, she is lying.¹

The Jukun have a like belief in the departure of the soul of the sleeping witch, to capture the soul of some innocent person. Some say that a witch can be discovered because he takes long to waken, which proves that his soul was out on some nefarious errand. But the soul may wander on lawful occasions, without being concerned in witchcraft; the spirit stays with the body while the soul wanders.

The soul is attached to clothes, hair, and utensils, and by obtaining these the witch may capture the soul. Nothing can be done during the day, for a man's soul is then with him, but at night it may be entrapped as it wanders; it would seem from the information given by Meek that it is the personal soul that is captured during its wandering in sleep.

Good and strong men may be immune from attack by witches, and others may use charms to protect themselves. Those who have bitter blood are in no danger, as witches will not suck this; hence men may ask the god of the after-world to let them be reborn with bitter blood so as to be free from witches.

When the soul is captured the witch may hide it in a secret place, in a pot or near the fire, where the soul will be tortured by the heat. Whereupon the sufferer, who is sick through losing his soul, shrieks out in a burning fever. The soul will be cut in pieces and eventually eaten. It is asserted that the cutting and cooking are to be spiritually understood; for there is no material proof of these assertions.

Witch-doctors try to recover the stolen soul. A man may go to the house of a suspected witch, and overturn all his belongings in order to find the lost soul. The doctor will pretend to

¹ S. F. Nadel, in *Africa*, viii, pp. 423-447.

find the soul, and catch it in a shea-butter dish. The patient is rubbed with butter, and the soul is thought to be restored. Or the witch may be taken a gift by the sick man's relatives, and besought to restore the soul.¹

The Ngizim of Bornu have a rite which is supposed to restore lost souls stolen by witches. A diviner goes in search of the soul, with a calabash of water. When he finds it, the soul is put in the calabash and he hastens back to the patient. The water is poured over the sick man, who gives a deep sigh (doubtless at the douche), which is taken as a sign of the re-entry of the soul.

Among neighbouring tribes, a female diviner will assert that she sees the soul before her, and that it must be fetched immediately. She goes out with her calabash of water, and three male attendants. The soul is sought for by trees, stones, wells, and markets. When she sees the soul, she cries out, scratches the ground, and makes pretence of transferring it to the calabash. The gourd is said to become heavy, and the squeaks of the soul can be heard coming from it. The men take the calabash to the sick man's hut, and pour the water over his head, his sighs proving the return of the soul. Diviners are often ventriloquists, and I have heard similar pretence of squeaking spirits from a bag, in Yoruba country.

The Mambila think that a man can impart the power of witchcraft to his son by certain practices. He takes the soul of a maternal relative and, having cooked it, gives a piece of the liver to his son, together with a medicine. A man may buy witchcraft, by presenting similar gifts to a witch. She eats some of the soul offered, but gives part of the liver and other medicine to the applicant. Every corpse is opened before burial, to see whether the deceased was a witch; this is held to be proved if the heart is surrounded with rough matter.

The Gabin make pots, which are like soul-counterparts. The pots are held to receive the soul, which in there is secure from attacks by witches. The witch could not harm the soul, unless he found the pot; if he found it, and buried it, the owner of the pot would die. This seems to be the nearest approach in West Africa to the idea of a removable or "bush" soul, deposited elsewhere for safety.²

The Muhammadan Hausa think that witches can change into any form that they desire, and that they live like vam-

¹ *A Sudanese Kingdom*, pp. 203 ff., 294 ff.

² *Tribal Studies*, i, pp. 44, 550; ii, pp. 238, 375, 402.

pires. Their principal way of catching victims is by changing into beautiful girls. Witches are said to have many mouths, and by an effort of will these can be made to appear all over the witch's body, and can be made to return into one mouth by the witch slapping herself. The mouths are able to eat and drink, but their owner does not like being seen in this state as they are the sign of possession by evil powers. Peeping Toms, who pry on the witch in this state, are said in the folklore to be menaced with death.

Witches are not thought to have much power in towns, but have to lure their intended prey away to a distance. The victim cannot be seized simply at the will of the witch, but must be induced freely to place himself in her power. The witch may not be necessarily malignant unless offended, but here as elsewhere witches are thought to be touchy and quick-tempered. Hausa witches may be benevolent, and give charms for sickness; their favour can be won by rubbing their backs while washing, a pleasure desired by them because it is of rare occurrence owing to their often living in solitude. Fables, which tell of the visits of young men to witches, sometimes tend to identify them with visits to the house of Death, and there appears to be some primitive connexion between the underworld and the dwellings of witches.¹

There are both resemblances to and differences from witchcraft in other parts of Africa. Dr. Evans-Pritchard tells us that the Azande believe that certain persons have a "witchcraft-substance" in their bodies. This can be diagnosed by oracles as existing in the body of a living witch, and discovered by autopsy in the corpse of a dead one. Certain witch-doctors claim to produce by medicines a "witchcraft-phlegm" in their bodies, different from the "substance" of witches, and they can expectorate this phlegm. Witchcraft is the result of a psychic emanation from the "substance" of the witch, which goes out to injure the health or property of others. A witch can send out a light, which is not the witch in person, but is an emanation sent out after the prey. The witch remains asleep at home, while the "soul of his witchcraft" is dispatched to remove the "soul of the flesh", the psychic element, of his victim's body. The soul of the organ captured will be devoured by the witch, but it is incorporeal vampirism.²

The Bantu believe that witches discarnate at night, and go

¹ *Hausa Superstitions and Customs*, pp. 154-157.

² *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic*, pp. 9, 34.

off to cast spells on or eat their victims. Some think that witches not only assume animal forms themselves, but can also change their bewitched victims into animals and send them out to work their wicked designs, destroying crops, or even cultivating the fields of their masters. Apparently the Basuto consider that the entire person of the witch, body and soul, flies off during sleep, although the other occupants of the hut do not notice this disappearance. The Thonga say that the physical body remains behind, although it is declared that this is really the body of a wild animal, such as a hyena.

As to whether the witches are conscious of their actions, Bantu opinion is confused. The oldest idea seems to be that they are not aware, in their waking hours, of what they have done while asleep. Especially is this true of beginners, who may be quite ignorant of their foul nocturnal actions, until a diviner reveals the horrid truth to them. Older witches are more knowledgeable, and are even proud of their prowess and powers, considering themselves superior to the ignorant crowd that has no such faculties. Some witches renounce their evil ways, and use their psychic faculties in order to thwart the machinations of other witches.¹

West African witchcraft is mysterious to the European because the people who are accused of it, and who often confess under pressure, are frequently apparently harmless old creatures. They seem to be very different from the deliberately evil black magician. Often the witches are not simply wicked people, but may be well-meaning members of society. Even stranger, they are thought to harm and kill people whom it would not appear natural for them to wish to destroy. It is widely repeated that witches can only harm their own relatives, and often their own children.

Such common ground as there is between West African and ancient European beliefs, spiritual cannibalism and imaginary nocturnal metamorphosis and assembly, suggests that the only explanation possible at present is that furnished by modern psychology, as far as it goes. There is no proof of any physical gatherings of witches or of communication between them. After a long investigation of some hundreds of accused witches, Dr. Field says that she does not know whether there are any real witch assemblies. There may have been anti-social and cannibalistic meetings centuries ago.

Since to the African the fantasies of his dreams are wan-

¹ *Moeurs et Coutumes des Bantous*, ii, pp. 456-467.

derings of the soul, and just as real as waking life, there seems little doubt that one cause of the astonishing admissions of highly improbable soul-eating is furnished by dreams, and even more by their manifest content and the interpretation given to them by the dreamer.

Modern psychology helps us to understand how it is that well-meaning people can entertain horrible thoughts about their nearest relatives; for it is such a common phenomenon, especially among the neurotic. It is a romantic error to suppose that African life is less troubled by personal strain than our own, that their existence is a pastoral idyll of innocence and *belles sauvages*. Neurosis and kinship stresses are probably as common as in our own society.

Continuance of belief in witchcraft may well be one of the effects of obsessional neurosis. Freud describes this in terms that apply to much of African witchcraft. "The obsessional neurosis takes this form: the patient's mind is occupied with thoughts that do not really interest him, he feels impulses which seem alien to him, and he is compelled to perform actions which not only afford him no pleasure but from which he is powerless to desist. . . . Mostly they consist of something terrifying, such as temptations to commit serious crimes, so that the patient not only repudiates them as alien, but flees from them in horror, and guards himself by prohibitions, precautions, and restrictions against the possibility of carrying them out."¹

With such obsessions filling the mind by day, present and yet suppressed, it is small wonder if the mind finds release at night, through the ideas common to society. Anyone having entertained such thoughts, will confess to a good deal under pressure of accusation and suggestion.

Add to this the memories of cannibalism among some secret societies, and the belief in animal forms taken by men deriving from totemism, and it will be seen that the ground is not unsuitable to the production of fantastic notions of witchcraft.²

That people are believed to suffer inwardly and mysteriously from the activities of witches, is explicable partly from the ignorance of the symptoms of many of the internal diseases. Furthermore, who can tell the effect of mind over matter, of one mind over another, and of the harm that may be caused by constantly thinking evil of an enemy?

¹ *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-analysis*, E.T., 1922, p. 219.

² There is, of course, the almost universal belief in soul-eating by witches. Malinowski writes about "corpse-devouring and man-killing flying witches" in Melanesia. *Crime and Custom in Savage Society*, 1926, p. 87.

CHAPTER 14

POSSESSION

POSSESSION is a psychological phenomenon, consideration of which may follow on the discussion on witchcraft, because the latter is sometimes attributed to the activity of a psychical entity exterior to the witch's own soul and spirit.

There are several types of possession, distinguished by such authorities as T. K. Oesterreich.¹ One, with which witchcraft may be connected, considers that a demon or spirit enters into the body of the living person, against his own will. Europeans used to call these spirits "devils"; in Africa they are often thought to be souls of the departed which cannot find rest.

A second type of possession is voluntary, being induced by whatever means are available, and being considered to put the medium into touch with unseen spirits, generally for the good of society.

Montague Summers says of witchcraft that, "Many of these cases were due to natural causes, epilepsy, acute hysteria, incipient lunacy, and the like. But . . . there will yet remain a very considerable quota which it seems impossible to account for and explain save on the score of possession by some evil and hostile intelligence." He concludes that "spiritualism opens the door to demoniac possession", and therefore "modern Spiritualism is merely Witchcraft revived".²

On the other hand, Oesterreich says that, "the great difference between modern hysterical attacks and the old states of possession is psychic. Viewed from the outside, as regards contortions and motor excitement the states are similar; but from the modern psychological point of view, in so far as the study of modern cases permits us to formulate a judgment, they are, owing to the attitude adopted by the patients towards their fits, totally different. Today they consider them as natural phenomena, pathological manifestations, even although they sometimes try to resist them. They never doubt for a single instant that they and they alone experience these states which even now seem often to show a compulsive character (a consequence of their persistence, even when an individual struggles against them). Formerly, on the contrary, the idea of possession

¹ *Possession, Demoniacal and Other*, E.T., 1930.

² *Op. cit.*, pp. 220, 253, 269.

supervened and occasioned an automatic development of the compulsion in the direction of a secondary character."¹

It will be seen that there are two explanations possible: one which distinguishes possession by a spirit from hysteria, and the other which considers all possession to be hysterical; but the differences of interpretation largely depend on the *milieu* and the period.

In Africa, all hysterical phenomena appear to be considered as due to possession by some extraneous force. But these forces may be distinguished from one another, according to the type of spirit which is believed to animate the medium.

Dr. Field seems to be one of the few who have shown clearly that there is belief in a spirit which possesses a witch. The word used by both Gã and Fanti for witch is *aye*, which is also used of the power of prosperous people, like the Yoruba *ashe*. But the witch is believed, by the Gã, to be indwelt by a spiritual entity, for which the Twi word *obeye* is used, and which seems to denote a demonic power. The witch-doctor has this power also, and must be able to control and exorcize the demons that are in witches with great care, lest he himself become dominated by the demoniac influence.²

The Ewe word *aze*, used for a witch, may mean also the spirit which possesses her. The spirit takes up its abode in a woman, in particular, and makes her the slave of its will, so that she obeys the compulsive power within her. When the witch changes into an animal, it is this demon which goes forth from the witch's body.

The Agni agree that in certain, fairly rare, cases witches may be innocent of evil intent, even if proved guilty of wrong-doing by causing injury to another person. This exceptional excuse is accepted if the witch confesses at once to the wrong done, but complains that it was not her fault, having been constrained thereto by an evil spirit which had forced its will on the unconscious witch, possessing her against her will. In such a case, the excuse may be accepted by the community, but the witch-doctor proceeds to dispossess the witch of the spirit by exorcism. Sometimes the witch is given an offering to take into the forest, so as to propitiate the evil possessing spirit, with the belief that if an animal is substituted the spirit will leave the witch alone.

But this opinion is by no means the general rule, and King Boa Kwasi of the Agni told Tauxier his emphatic opinion, "It

¹ *Possession*, p. 127. ² *Religion and Medicine of the Gã*, pp. 137-156.

is the witch himself who is the evil spirit, the devil. It is not a devil who possesses him; it is himself who is the devil, who acts the devil". No doubt there is a European connotation attached to the word "devil", for while there are evil spirits believed in yet there is no general belief in a supreme author and worker of all evil such as is found in Hebrew-Christian demonology.¹

The Bambara also consider the witch sometimes as a person possessed by an evil spirit, which has entered into him. Since the spirit comes into people, it follows that some are unconscious witches. But generally it is believed that the witches act of their own accord, and give themselves with relish to their evil ways. A popular Bambara fable tells of a witch who had a beautiful daughter, and who ate all the suitors who came for the girl's hand. She was deceived by a young man who tricked her into eating her own daughter, instead of the cunning suitor. But although by day the witch seemed to be unconscious of her evil deed, yet there is no suggestion that she was forced into it against her own will, by some possessing spirit, but only that she did not know while eating that it was her own daughter.²

Where it is believed that a certain witch is possessed by an evil spirit, it is thought either that the demon has been born in her, inherited from a dying witch, or else that she has bought it at a low price or received it as a gift. A departed spirit is thought to be able to send a demon of witchcraft to its survivors, if they have done anything to annoy the dead one; no doubt fears of the dead help in forming this opinion. People may have the demon forced on them against their will, and for this reason may be treated more leniently than normally, as a sick person. I knew a woman who was plagued by the thought of an evil spirit tormenting her, because she had refused to become a witch. Even those who at first have sought the power of a possessing spirit may believe themselves to have come so much under its dominion as to be tormented by it, an ambivalent attitude, like obsessional neurotics who may both relish and hate jealous thoughts.

No doubt the witches feel that there are compelling influences around and within them, so that they no longer do what they would in their best moments, but sin dwells in them. They attribute their evil thoughts to malignant spirits, and believe

¹ *Religion, mœurs et Coutumes des Agnis*, p. 84.

² *Religion Bambara*, pp. 57-59.

that these spirits import their own jealousies into the innocent mind of the medium, who then kills the soul of the beloved relative against his conscious intention.

It is interesting to note that exposure is believed to destroy the power of the demons, who need to work in secret. Once their evil intentions are revealed in the light of day, their power is broken.

The possession of witches is believed to be operated by evil spirits, both the witches themselves being under the evil power of the spirits, and the sick persons considered as the prey of the spirits. Demons, either from a witch or from some discarnate force, are given as the cause of many diseases which we should attribute to nervous disorder. Spirits of sickness are often exorcized, sometimes being transferred to a scapegoat.

The other type of possession, which we Europeans call hysterical dissociation or trance, is thought to be due to the intrusion of a strange soul or force. While Biblical writers considered this to originate from noxious demons, it is often held in West Africa to mark the presence of a divine and possibly beneficial agency.

Lunatics are treated with an awful respect. So are children, who are nearer to the spirit-world. But those who are subject to falling into trances are thought to be nearest to contact with the forces of the unseen world. The trance may be at first unsought, but it soon becomes provoked and taken as a sign of divine energizing. "To primitive people the possessed stand as intermediaries between the world of men and the spirit-world; the spirits speak through their mouth. It is therefore no wonder that as soon as men realized that states of this kind could be voluntarily induced, free use was made of the fact. . . . The auto-suggestibility of primitive races makes itself felt in the marked frequency with which states of this nature are deliberately provoked. As soon as they are expected by the person concerned they obviously come on with great readiness."¹

So successful is most of this induced dissociation, or auto-hypnosis, that it leads to enhanced prestige in West African society, instead of lowering the social consideration as it would in our own society. The African regards these hysterics as oracles of divine and departed spirits.

Possession normally begins spontaneously: it is a gift, although, where there is a highly developed system of training

¹ *Possession*, pp. 236-241.

for mediums, as in Dahomey, the priests may choose likely subjects. The training that ensues will have as one of its aims the inducement of the states of dissociation.

The fit of possession may come on at home, at work, or in the bush. But usually it is caught by infection at a public dance, when the drumming, excitement, and sight of others in fits contribute to induce a similar state in those who are highly suggestible. The subject may resist the attack, and will then live in misery and mental conflict until some release is found; dumbness or madness is said to result if a man or woman refuses the divine call.

Once again, Dr. Field has given the best descriptions of hysterical possession in West Africa. When the medium is in a fit, she appears to act spontaneously yet in an abstracted fashion. It is normally women who are possessed, and they are controlled by male priests. The medium may imitate other people's dancing, or prance around as if impelled by some other power. The fit is usually genuine, though since it is produced to order there may well be a certain amount of pretence, which merges into complete abstraction as the fit becomes more intense. The fit undergoes modifications from the control exercised by the priest, and novices who begin by talking gibberish become gradually capable of uttering coherent sentences while in a fit. They may speak in "tongues", or other languages, which may not be among those spoken by the medium when in a normal frame of mind; but investigation generally shows that these tongues come from the subconscious memories of the medium, languages that she has heard from foreigners or when staying in another land.

The medium may be possessed by several spirits one after another. "At each change of personality she goes round the ring shaking hands and greeting her friends on behalf of her possessing spirit, and when this leaves her she often bends down flapping her hands an inch or two over the ground, as though shaking something out of her finger-tips, and saying, *Hoi, hoi!* in a barking kind of voice."¹ The spirit possessing her may be a warrior, and the medium will act the part, with male dress and sword. She may be a cripple, a hunchback, a pregnant woman, a coquettish girl, or an animal on all fours; always acting the part, and adopting postures and voices suitable to the nature of the spirit. When the spirit is in need of nourishment, beer is poured over the legs or food rubbed into the skin

¹ *Religion and Medicine of the Gã*, p. 105.

of the medium. She may also be given water in the mouth for herself while jiggling about.

If the medium is possessed during a public dance, her friends will rush her aside, and dress her up for the part, undoing her hair and decking her with clothes and beads. If the fit comes on at home, a crowd will be summoned easily, and a dance started, for there may be some divine message to pass on. When the fit is over the medium comes to her senses as if waking from sleep and seems bewildered at her dress and attendants. Her face gets older, and she professes to have no knowledge of what has happened during the possession. Normally even-tempered, many of them, the fit serves to let off steam and dispose of accumulated energy and subconscious thoughts.¹

Among the Akan, priests and priestesses are held to be under spirit influence when in trance; more so, apparently, than with the Gã and Ewe, whose priests usually do not go into trance themselves, but employ mediumistic assistants to discover the will of the spirits. If an Ashanti man goes into fits he may remain in a semi-mad state for months, until a priest tells him that this condition comes from a god who wishes to receive his service. Training will then begin, in which a return of the ecstatic state is induced, under the instruction of an older priest.²

Priests and mediums when under the spirit-influence often talk in other dialects, and that is held to denote the presence of spirits from the localities where the language is spoken. I have pointed out, in my previous book, that these tongues are often ritual languages, connected with the place of origin of the cult to which the medium belongs, and it may be taught as in the Dahomean convents.

When a priest wishes to work himself up so as to feel the presence of his god within him, he dresses and powders himself, and then begins to dance to the sound of the drums played by his attendants. He may hold the bowl-shrine of his god upon his head, or it may be held by an assistant. In this state, messages from the god come to him, and he will address them to the bystanders in general, or deliver individual messages. In a public dance, when names of great priests are called by the drums, priests will shake as if the spirit of the departed priest had possessed them.³

All along the Guinea Coast similar states of possession come

¹ *Religion and Medicine of the Gã*, pp. 100-108.

² *Religion and Art in Ashanti*, pp. 38 ff.

³ *Ashanti*, pp. 147, 162.

upon priests or their assistants. Among the Grebo of Liberia, when the priests are possessed they fall to the ground, gnash with their teeth, and often go stark as if dead. Those who show such signs spontaneously are trained by an older priest for several months, and tests are applied to find out whether the novice can divine secrets when under inspiration.¹

The Christian prophet Harris was a Grebo, and he gave oracles when in trance, and accompanied his singing by dancing. In the Ivory Coast, I have observed a Christian prophetess go into a trance, give messages from God and Jesus, and administer healing medicines to those who consult her.

Similar ecstatic phenomena are to be found among the Yoruba, coming more commonly from the attendant devotees than from the priests themselves.

Possession is often associated with an animal, a totem, a god, or an "affinity" of the soul. Talbot describes cases of possession among the Ibibio, where the spirit of a wild boar was thought to enter women. One became so strong in the ecstasy that men could not hold her, and she would bound from the floor with superhuman strength. She could only be quieted by a man of the same totem, who would only lay his hand lightly upon her for the excitement to subside, and the woman would return to a normal state of mind. Leopard and snake possession are very common.²

The Jukun have a cult of Yaku, similar to the Mam cult of other Benue peoples, the devotees of which become possessed by spirits, ancestors and gods. The chief priestess is described as a returned ancestor. The mediums may become dumb temporarily, refuse to eat, and go into ecstasy while they throw themselves around or slash themselves with knives.

The Bornu tribes have strong beliefs in possession among their doctors, who treat those who are ill from the wandering of their souls, a malady to which women are more subject than men. The doctor goes into a trance to discover the whereabouts of the missing soul, and then goes out for it with a calabash of water, as previously described. If consulted as to the future, he gets worked up into a frenzy, and speaks in other tongues. He may climb on to the roof of the hut, and sit there in meditation. When a priest or priestess dies, the possessing spirit will pass into one of the nearest relatives.³

¹ H. Johnston, *Liberia*, pp. 1070-1071.

² *Life in Southern Nigeria*, pp. 92 ff.

³ *Tribal Studies*, ii, pp. 236, 261, 520.

Among the Hausa there was a popular form of possession, called *bori*. This is a self-induced state, resulting in hysteria, which is attributed to the presence of a possessing spirit. The medium imitates animals and people, and may ill-treat himself. The spirit was expelled by sneezing. *Bori* was said to have been intended originally as a cure for insanity, or for hysterical tendencies, but it degenerated in the hands of disreputable practitioners. It was not necessarily disgraceful, though many considered it objectionable. *Bori* dancing was said to have begun in the Hausa states before the arrival of Muhammadanism. It was later forbidden in the towns, though it lingered in the villages, and was performed in towns if a fine was paid. Later it was forbidden by the British government.

Others, not possessed with spirits, are yet held by the Hausa to have unusual spiritual power; to be able to become invisible; to be immune to weapons, which will break or their edges wear off; or to turn into animal form.¹

Possession by spirits is believed in practically throughout Africa, but there are varying degrees of belief and classification. Dr. Smith describes spirit possession among the Ba-ila in four categories, as follows:

1. Temporary possession by the ghost of a murdered man who haunts his killer, the ghost being supposed to take up its residence in the solar plexus, centre of emotions. Ghost haunting, but not often ghost possession, is believed in also in West Africa.

2. Temporary possession as a cause of illness, delirium being attributed to spirits, as often in West Africa.

3. Intermittent possession, as of demoniacs; drums are beaten so that the possessed person may speak the name of the possessing spirit, after which the trance may pass off.

4. A more intense possession, during which the person utters messages from the unseen. These are more properly mediums, and are thought to be held or seized by the spirit of an ancestor or a god. The spirits prophesy future events, accuse people of witchcraft, or describe voyages into the world beyond, which they are believed to have experienced while in ecstasy.²

Most of this can be said of West African possession. It should be noted that the possessing spirits do not replace the spirit of the medium, but her own personality is in abeyance while under the ecstasy.

In West Africa, as in so many other parts of the world, and

¹ *Hausa Superstitions*, pp. 145 ff.; *Northern Tribes*, ii, p. 34.

² *Ila-speaking Peoples*, ii, pp. 136-152.

as with the prophets of Yahweh, the priests or mediums go into trances, wear strange clothing, perform unusual deeds, or even slash themselves in a masochistic frenzy, like the prophets of Baal. Abnormality and even temporary insanity are marks of divine presence. The hysterical are thought to have a heightened perception of spiritual things. Whether their utterances are more moral than those of normal folk is another question, and one that needs far closer investigation on the field than it has received hitherto.

The ecstasy is considered to be essential to the medium. He cannot speak of himself, but only as he is seized and inspired by some supernatural force. It is during the trance that he receives the power of seeing the invisible, and discovering occult secrets. Father Tempels has pointed out truly that the force of the medium does not come from his instructor, but from the possessing spirit. The initiation rites through which the novice has to pass are means to an end, but they cannot in themselves convey the divine power; neither can the priest do this, under whom the neophyte studies the details of his future possession. The priest, of course, has a "numinous" power, some of which may be conveyed to the apprentice; but unless a divine power is believed to take hold of the novice, all the rest is vanity. It not infrequently happens that, after a long course of training, the priest has to send the apprentice away; he does not suit, because there is thought to be something wrong in him which prevents the entry of the divine forces. The true neophyte goes into a trance where he loses consciousness, becomes perhaps as one dead for a time, and is reborn from this cataleptic state with a divine force and exalted knowledge.¹

It is generally assumed that Africans are entirely mistaken in their interpretation of the psychic phenomena, but not all, even of psychologists, would assert that the whole thing is a fraud or a mistake.

Priests and mediums practise *télépathy* and *clairvoyance*. Many people maintain that they can talk with friends at a distance. A man who is lost in reverie is thought to have his soul absent, and to be in conversation with folk far away. Priests also claim to possess a *telergizing* power, by which others are forced to do their will. This may be a form of hypnotism. Boys are put into a hypnotic state by some diviners who wish to obtain news from the gods or the underworld. The interpretation may be doubtful, but the practice is quite understandable.

¹ *Philosophie Bantoue*, pp. 65-66.

Telepathy seems to be one of the psychic phenomena that is becoming generally accepted by most modern psychologists. Even Freud wrote, "Naturally not all cases have equal evidential value, nor in all cases is it equally possible to rule out more rational explanations; but taking all the evidence together there remains a heavy weight of probability in favour of the reality of thought-transference".¹

Mediums claim to be able to discover secrets, and to foretell the future. In addition to trance, other methods are used in Africa, such as water-gazing, and geomancy, as described in my previous book. Some would say that not all of these mediums are deluded. In one of his latest books, McDougall wrote, "The ancient belief in clairvoyance, the obtaining of knowledge of the objective world, knowledge not possessed by any other living person, by means utterly different from sense-perception and utterly mysterious, at present seems also to be in a fair way to be established. Further, precognition, or foresight of events that lie in the future, is also under experimental investigation that seems to promise positive results. These new and more assured foundations for these old beliefs seem to support strongly the view that our psychical life is less closely bound up with the material of the body than is commonly assumed".²

Even if the concomitant phenomena come to be understood, that does not prove the reality of spirit possession. But some psychologists have maintained that there is a possibility of more than one psychic entity being associated with one bodily organism. Cases of secondary or dual personality have been studied, although it is generally assumed from the outset that, even if there may be two streams of mental activity or consciousness, they are formed by a split in the normal stream of consciousness. Oesterreich concludes, "There is a sort of intermediate position between belief in real possession by spirits and the complete rejection of early accounts of the inspiration of the Pythoneses. It is possible to hold the latter as genuine without attributing it to the entrance of a strange soul into her soul or body. . . . We must defer an answer to these questions till we know more of parapsychic phenomena, their frequency and conditions of origin. The purely negative reply which so greatly facilitated for rationalism the historical criticism of all these accounts is frankly no longer possible today".³

It is impossible, of course, entirely to disprove the existence

¹ *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, p. 56.

² *The Riddle of Life*, 1938, p. 235.

³ *Op. cit.*, p. 389.

and activity of discarnate spirits, and the influence which they may continue to exercise upon the living. It is true that, since the decline of belief in spirits, the state of possession seems to have diminished among Europeans. No doubt the beliefs and mental atmosphere of society contribute largely to the production of abnormal phenomena, as may be seen also in the belief in witchcraft. No doubt, also, there is an easy road to fraud, and artificial inducement of trance states. But it is also true that those who might be called possessed, in our own society, are hidden from public view in mental hospitals. Only the psychiatrist knows the great extent of mental abnormality prevalent in European society.

The cause and reality of possession must be left an open question. One of the most recent writers on psychical research, Dr. G. N. M. Tyrrell, a President of the Society for Psychical Research, suggests that the theory of the subliminal self covers most of the ground revealed by psychic phenomena. This subliminal self seems to exist outside of time and behind consciousness. Yet Dr. Tyrrell agrees that some of the predictions and cross-correspondences, made in tested experiments, are as easily explicable from the hypothesis of the activity of discarnate entities. Indeed, the rejection of belief in discarnate beings implies such complicated assumptions about human nature that "as an alternative to the discarnate theory, it is a scarcely less marvellous alternative". And if the amazing cross-correspondences performed by Mrs. Willett are to be put down to a "piece of play-acting on the part of some fragment of Mrs. Willett's personality, it discloses a quintessence of dramatic skill which strikes one dumb with amazement".¹ In his review of this book, Dr. C. E. M. Joad said that "only to our own age, I suggest, could it seem an implausible and reactionary view, that the familiar world with its concepts of space, time, matter and causality may be only a department of reality or perhaps even a veil through which we can sometimes glimpse a reality of a different order".²

¹ *The Personality of Man*, 1946, p. 167.

² In *The New Statesman and Nation*, vol. xxxiv, No. 865.

CHAPTER 15

DREAMS

THE belief that while a man is asleep his soul leaves his body, and has many adventures, is wellnigh universal among peoples at an early stage of culture. It is for this reason that touching a sleeper, or waking him roughly, may be fraught with danger. As Frazer says, "Still more dangerous is it in the opinion of primitive man to move a sleeper or alter his appearance, for if this were done the soul on its return might not be able to find or recognize its body, and so the person would die".¹

Muhammadan peoples hold this belief in the absence of the soul from the body during sleep, and it is suggested by a verse of the Koran: "God taketh souls unto Himself at death; and during sleep those who do not die: and He retaineth those on which He hath passed a decree of death, but sendeth the others back till a time that is fixed."²

Westermarck has shown that the Moors of North Africa do not distinguish as we do between the reality of sleeping and waking life but, believing the soul to absent itself from the body during sleep, they consider that their dream experiences are real and not illusory. The same holds true of Muslims in West Africa.³

LOWER GOLD COAST AND IVORY COAST

We have seen that, in Akan belief, the personality-soul (*sunsum*) is not bound to the body until death, but can wander about during sleep and sickness, the latter being often considered as caused by absence of soul. During sleep a man's soul may talk with other sleeping souls, or rather with the souls of other sleeping bodies. It may quarrel with them, and have sexual relations with them. But the adventures of the soul are taken very literally, and if a man boasts of having had sexual intercourse with the soul of another man's wife, then he will be taken before a court of law and the evidence of the dream will be considered as clear proof of guilt.

If a man does have such a guilty dream, he must go and confess it on waking to the village midden and women's latrine, where all bad things are cast, and pray that such a thing may

¹ *Golden Bough*, i, p. 259.

² Rodwell's translation, xxxix, 43, p. 258.

³ *Op. cit.*, p. 46.

never happen physically. One who dreams of intercourse with a departed spirit, with whom it had such relations during life, will become sterile. Hence widows take great pains to avoid their husband's ghost during the period of mourning, changing their rooms and wearing male clothing to deceive the spirit. If they were to have intercourse with other men before the end of the year of mourning, it is thought that the husband's ghost would be angry, and would return to sleep with the widow and make her barren or cause her to die. Hence widows wear a key during mourning, to show that access to them is locked.

The Twi word for dreaming means to lie down and to arrive at a place, hence "to arrive at a place in sleep". This shows that the soul is believed to visit other places during the sleep of the body. Dreams may be caused, it is thought, by the wanderings of one's own soul, or by the visit of other living souls, or by visits from spirits of the departed from the other world, or by ghosts of those who cannot attain to the world beyond. Not to dream for a long period is regarded as a very bad sign, and may cause madness if prolonged.

Dreams are interpreted by the help of the elders, or of a priest who seeks advice from his god, or from some knowledgeable old woman. Rattray has given considerable space to the interpretations given to dreams in Ashanti. Dreams of ancestors are thought to signify the death of another member of the family; to dream of an ancestor leading you away means that they are trying to draw you to the spirit-world yourself, and medicine must be taken immediately on waking to prevent this catastrophe. Dreams of other visits of departed spirits may only mean that they have been neglected and need offerings of food putting on their stools; if they are accompanied in the dream by a sheep, then a sheep must be sacrificed to them. Ancestors appear to change in dreams often into animal shape; as the dreamer watches them they turn into a sheep or a tree. Sometimes they are half-human and half-animal; doubtless there is a connexion here with metamorphosis and totemism. A ghostly ancestor may cause a nightmare, by appearing in the form of a cow and chasing the dreamer who, on waking, must bathe to remove the influence of the ghost.

Rattray gives these interpretations of dreams, as offered by the Ashanti. To dream of fish means that the dreamer's wife will conceive. To dream of snails or pulling mushrooms means a funeral; ghosts are believed to live on snails, and perhaps

the hole made by pulling mushrooms is a symbol for a grave. To dream of a house without a roof is a sign of death, for in the spirit-world the houses are believed to have no roofs. Other dreams are interpreted by opposites: a dream of the death of a certain person may be a token of fortune for him; falling into a latrine in dream means gaining money; finding gold means poverty; weeping means joy; laughter means sorrow.

Other symbols are that when a hunter dreams of killing an elephant that means a chief will die. A dream of losing a tooth means the death of a friend. The student of Freud will not be surprised to learn that dreaming of flying on a broomstick is taken by the Ashanti to mean long life. But, strangely, the dream of climbing a tree is interpreted as indicating sickness, perhaps because of the breathlessness associated with climbing, and recalling the climb up the hill of death, during which dying men pant for breath.¹

The Gã connect dreams with their spiritual relatives, the sky-family from which a man comes at birth and to which he returns at death. People who walk in their sleep are said to be endeavouring to return to their sky-family. Such persons consult a medium so as to discover why the soul is not satisfied with its earthly life; the medium consults her god who asks the consultant's soul what is the matter; the soul knows better than its owner, and will tell the trouble to the god. If people cry in their sleep, that means that they are being scolded by their sky-family, for neglect of a promise made by the soul before returning to earth. Nightmares of being chased by people are taken to mean that some sky-relative is pursuing the dreamer. But happier dreams may indicate that the sky-family are offering food to the soul; if the soul ate the food in the dream, however, it would die.

It is the personality-soul (*susuma*) that wanders in dreams, while the spirit remains with the body. Children who scratch their faces in sleep are said to have their souls and spirits fighting one another. A sleeper should not be wakened suddenly, lest the soul be unable to return to the body in time. Witches' souls travel away along invisible cobwebs, which still connect their souls with their bodies, and if anyone were to find this cobweb and cut it the soul would not be able to return to the body, which would die.²

The Adjukru explain dreams as due to the visits of ancestors,

¹ *Religion and Art*, pp. 93, 192-195.

² *Religion and Medicine of the Gã*, pp. 92-97.

or as symbolical, or by opposites. Thus oil in a dream represents blood, and by extension wounds in the chase or battle. Ground-nuts in dreams symbolize the coming of children, which is easily understandable from their prolific reproduction. Maize also denotes children. Smoked fish is a sign of a funeral. But, interpreting by opposites, there is the pessimistic fear that to dream of a man in splendid clothing is a presage of the death of that person.

UPPER GOLD COAST, UPPER IVORY COAST, SUDAN

The Mossi think dreams are caused by the personality-soul wandering in sleep. Its adventures are real, although they happen to the soul and not to the body. But the body may suffer after-effects of the soul's exploits. If a man dreams that he is being eaten by a lion, and his soul has been so eaten, then his body will slowly perish, in days or months.

The Mossi distinguish four sorts of dreams. Those which are true, i.e. the wanderings of the soul. Those which are caused by the appearance of ancestors or spirits. Those which are false, but true symbolically. Those completely false.

Many dreams are attributed to the intervention of ancestors, revealing their will. Some dreams have no meaning at all.

Many dreams are symbolical. To dream of bees is a symbol of arrows, and an omen of war. To dream of being chased by a dog means that a witch is plotting to eat the dreamer's soul. Millet in dream indicates an abundant harvest; water symbolizes many goods; food is a sign of plenty; agony is a premonition of death. Other dreams are straightforward: dreaming of the adultery of one's wife means that she deceives her husband; to dream of a donkey means that one will gain such an animal.¹

Neighbouring Islamized tribes believe that spirits talk to men in their sleep. Jinns may appear in dreams to frighten people, who may become mad with fear. Marabouts prepare charms as protection against these genii, the latter not being ancestral spirits which are in paradise or hell. The Fulani (Peuls) think that ghosts, spirits of those who have just died, can appear to their survivors but without evil intent.²

The Bobo consider that it is bad to speak to a dead person of whom one dreams. If you laugh while asleep some woman wishes to marry you. Much millet or many cowries in dream symbolize war. Dreaming of fresh fish is a sign of many children.

¹ *Le Noir du Yatenga*, pp. 386-387.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 651 ff.

Dried fish denotes coming rain. To dream of a funeral is a sign of sickness, and perhaps of death. To dream of a snake means that you will acquire a powerful divinity. Dreams are distinguished by names indicating acquisitions, bad events, or nightmares. A man may dream of the soul of a dead animal belonging to him: the soul of the animal calls the man and if he replies his own soul is seized by the animal.¹

The Bambara believe that the soul is at liberty while the body is asleep, and they consider that its subsequent adventures may be taken literally or symbolically. A man who dreams that his soul is pursued and eaten by a snake or a lion may either sicken and die after this warning dream, or else the dream may be symbolical of misfortune that will come to another member of the family. If the dreamer has been pursued by a snake it may symbolize the birth of a child (the sexual image is not far to seek).

The dreaming soul is thought to be stronger during sleep than in the daytime, and it finds out things which are unknown to the waking body; thus if one dreams of being rich, one will become wealthy, the soul having discovered this in advance. Dreaming is thus a reality, and just as the soul is attached to the waking body, so in sleep the body is influenced by the adventures of the soul. The soul having conversed with friends, participated in a real feast or drinking-party, the person is not astonished when he awakens and finds his throat dry or stomach painful, for whatever his soul has done is a real event to him and affects his body also. If the sleeper is wakened too brusquely the soul may be separated from the body, and death supervene. If the soul has been engaged in fighting or tiring exercises, the waking body will feel bruised or weary.

Another common interpretation of dreams assigns many of them to the influence of visiting ancestral spirits or divine spirits. It is in the state of sleep that these spirits communicate most frequently with men. Normally the ancestral visitors are benevolent, but they may come to demand a sacrifice, and be angry at neglect. Ghosts and evil spirits cause nightmares.²

TOGO AND DAHOMEY

The Ewe often attribute nightmares and evil dreams to the activity of fairies or dwarfs, who disturb the wandering soul of the sleeper. These fairies appear to interest themselves particularly in sexual affairs, and are the cause of many palavers

¹ J. Cremer, *Les Bobo*, iv, pp. 179-180. ² *Religion Bambara*, pp. 26-28.

and some litigation, through the dream being taken literally as illicit intercourse.

Dreams are often thought to be warnings. They are sent by God, who wishes to communicate something important to the dreamer. Or they may be due to the visit of ancestral or divine spirits. They are associated with death and the dead, and one name given to them includes the word for death. Some declare that the departed only appear to men in dreams, and solely to those who have witnessed the last agony of the departed one. Dreams are said to take place in the head, although thought is sometimes associated with the heart or the loins.

Sleep-walking is believed to be lucky, as being sent by the snake god, whose characteristic signs are any things that move. The diviners are the principal interpreters of dreams, consulting the Ifa oracle, who declares the will of the gods. All that happens to a man from birth to death may be revealed by the oracle. A man who has nightmares will tell his demonic guardian (*legba*, *eshu*), and pray to be protected from impending evil. There are drugs which are believed to be able to show a man, while he is asleep, the names of his enemies and any plots that they may be forming against him.

Dreams are often potent factors in deciding the conversion of a man to Christianity, especially if a departed spirit appears and counsels this conversion, or if there is some divine intimation. A Fõn friend of mine related the two following dreams to me. On the day of his baptism into the Church, he had been taken forcibly by night to a pagan convent, and there obliged to train as a devotee. After some months' passive resistance, he finally succumbed to the example of his fellow novices, and began to learn the cult dances and dialect. Then one night he dreamed that he saw Jesus, who took away from the head of the apostate Christian a white disc, about the size of a penny; by this he understood that his baptism was taken away. In a succeeding dream he saw a demon, tall and black, with accoutrements of snails such as are worn by masked dancers of secret societies. The demon offered to give him whatever he wished; the dreamer asked for peace of mind, but this the demon could not give him.

The dreams are clear, and little symbolical. They were symptomatic of his state of mind, an inner conflict which was only finally resolved when he reaffirmed his allegiance to Christianity, after finishing his training in the convent, an act that cost him some persecution.

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NIGERIA

The Yoruba believe that knowledge of future events, or of distant happenings, may be obtained from dreams. Some are said to use a juice or a powder on and near their eyes before going to sleep, in order to promote the power of occult sight. There are some dreams which are transparently clear, and which come true; others are symbolical, or go by opposites. Diviners find out to which category the dream belongs, and thus interpret it.

The Ibibio also believe that the soul wanders away from the body during sleep, and that its adventures are real, sometimes producing injury, the effect of which is felt in waking hours. There is the danger of being trapped by witches during dream wanderings, and hence men will try to avoid this; if they dream of food they will make an effort to refuse it, lest it be a trap. The witches' souls are said to enter locked rooms, and wind their clothes round the sleeper. A dreamer thus assailed will call on the protecting spirits of his ancestors, and if they come to his aid the witches will fade away.¹

The Nupe believe that it is the "life-soul" (*ráyi*) that experiences dreams, while the "shadow-soul" (*fíṣíngi*) stays with the body during sleep. But sometimes this shadow-soul is separated from the body and visits a friend who perceives the other by means of his life-soul. It is believed that the separation of the shadow-soul from the body is performed by a man's guardian spirits, who permit him to see things invisible to waking sight. Nightmares are produced by witches, who are able to separate their own shadow-souls, and send them out to bother other people. One who is thus troubled by a witch has nightmares, headaches, bodily pains, and sickness. Perhaps he may see the person who is troubling him in his dreams, and call out his name either in sleep or in fever. But only if this happens five times is it taken as a proof of witchcraft. Sooth-sayers are consulted to explain bad or mysterious dreams and sickness, and will come to think that the same person is guilty of bewitching as the one of whom the sufferer has dreamt.²

The Jukun believe that, while a man is asleep, his soul visits all the places that he has been to during the previous day. Dreams thus live over again the daily round; a recognition of one of the causes of dreams that is also held by European psychologists. A man who wakes up slowly has his soul still

¹ *Life in Southern Nigeria*, pp. 119-126.

² Nadel, *loc. cit.*

away from the body, whereas one who awakens quickly has his soul beside him. The soul may wander in the daytime, in daydreams, when men gaze vacantly into space and then come to themselves with a start, which indicates the return of their soul.

The ancestors are believed to appear in dreams, generally to tell their relative that they need food. A dream of sexual intercourse is believed to mean that the dreamer has a spiritual husband or wife in the after-world.

Many dreams are interpreted by opposites. One who dreams of riches is likely always to remain poor (a good psychological analysis), while the same holds of a rich man dreaming that he is poor.

Other dreams are interpreted by similarity. A dream of white cloth means a death in the family, or in that of a friend, because a white cloth is used as a shroud. A dream of red worms is likewise a bad omen, for the Jukun, like the Ashanti, think that the dead feed on these worms which swarm out of the ground in multitudes at certain seasons. A dream of a mound of corn is also a bad sign, for the mound resembles a grave.

Other dreams are interpreted symbolically. Like the Ashanti, the Jukun think that a dream of fish means that the person's wife will conceive (fish is a common sexual symbol, according to the Freudian explanation of dream symbolism). Dreams of falling into deep pits are common and unpleasant. So are chasing dreams; a snake may seem to mount the dreamer's body, or a horseman ride down upon him in a narrow alley, or a madman attack him and the dreamer be paralysed and unable to flee. These are dreams of sexual assault, but it is not always clear whether they are men's or women's dreams.

Nightmares are followed by offerings to one's guardian mother, as the best means of protection. Dr. Meek describes a dream in which a man continually has a dream of going up the river with his mother, a pleasant sensation at first, but which changes to horror as the boat steams on to eternity (the river might symbolize the return to the mother's womb, at first pleasurable, but later fraught with fear as a sign of death).¹

The Kwotto also believe that the dream is due to the wandering of the soul, which visits other people and places, and whose experiences are as real as those of the waking body. Ancestors are particularly prominent in their dreams; often

¹ *Sudanese Kingdom*, pp. 202-216.

it is held that a newborn child is a returned ancestor because such a one appeared to the mother in pregnancy, and declared his intention of being born of her.¹

The Anga think that will-o'-the-wisps are dreaming souls searching for food. These are thought to fly about in the darkness, buzzing about with hissing sounds. Flying nocturnal beetles are killed, because they are thought to be the souls of evil living men, hunting down their enemies. Kagoro priests are said to be able to detect such evil souls, and to capture them by shutting them up in a room. Men who are sick come to identify these souls with their enemies, and the latter must then promise to leave their mischievous ways, under pain of slavery or death. The ancestors appear in dreams to their descendants, and the Teria say that their presence can be detected by a peculiar smell.²

The Muhammadan Tuareg, of the Sahara, have diverse interpretations of dreams. Black is a bad sign; white represents money. To dream of dates means that some near relative, or the dreamer himself, will be wounded. A snake is the sign of a spell cast by an evil person. The unexpected appearance of animals is taken as ominous. Women are the chief dream interpreters; they may use a mirror, or go to the graves of ancestors to consult them.³

On the other side of the continent, the Azande distinguish between oracular dreams and witchcraft dreams; the former being pleasant, and the latter bad. Yet all may be oracular, because if a man is bewitched in a dream some evil may well follow. Also an oracular dream that presages evil may be connected with witchcraft, which casts its shadow in advance. They believe that the soul wanders away from the body during sleep, and that a sleeping witch sends out the "soul of his witchcraft", to devour the "soul of the flesh" of his victim.

The Azande explain many dreams in oracular fashion, apart from witchcraft. It is bad to dream of being attacked by an elephant with intent to kill, even if one escapes it; this is an omen of death. Dreams of good things are fortunate; a dream of red sweet potatoes is a sign of meat to come; dreaming of a human corpse may mean an animal corpse killed in the hunt; wading in deep water may be a sign of riches, but dried up water may indicate poverty. Falling into a hole denotes a burial; a fish in a stream is a sign of a relative having inter-

¹ *Red Men of Nigeria*, pp. 163, 236. ² *Northern Tribes of Nigeria*, ii, p. 33.

³ *Les Touaregs du Hoggar*, p. 309.

course or committing adultery. Being bitten by a snake in a dream is a sign of witchcraft. Especial truth is attached to dreams about sexual intercourse, eating, marriage, and hunting.¹

In other parts of Africa, there appear like discriminations of good from witchcraft dreams. The meaning of dreams is held either to be manifest, or symbolical, or denoting the message of an ancestor.

The Bantu sometimes call sleep "the little death". The soul leaves its body temporarily, and embarks upon adventures of its own. It may meet the departed and talk with them, and these are real appearances of the dead. The Thonga do not like dreams, and if they are fulfilled in life that disgusts them, says Junod. If a man dreams of having sexual relations with a woman he may go and beat her with a stick, and depart leaving the stick on the ground without a word. The symbolism of the stick, and the sadism of the attack, will not be lost on those who are acquainted with psycho-analysis.²

Our information concerning West African dreams is not extensive, and there is a vast field for research by psychologists, especially among those tribes that have so far been little affected by contact with Europeans. It may be instructive to compare African methods of interpretation of dreams with those adopted by the foremost modern psychologists, such as Freud and Jung.

One of the most marked dreams is that in which a departed spirit appears, generally one recently deceased, but not infrequently an ancient ancestor or a tribal divinity. Modern psychologists maintain that when someone has died, for some time afterwards the bereaved person has a special dream, wherein there appear striking compromises between the certainty that this person is dead and a desire to recall him to life. The deceased may be dreamt of as half dead and half alive, or as living but liable to die if he realizes that he is dead, or as dead and yet still living because he has not realized his death. This type of dream of coming to life again is common in myth as in dream.

Dreams of the death of others, even of those near and dear, are interpreted by Freud as due to the egoism of the dreamer. Anyone opposing our will, which happens so often, may be disposed of in dreams, even if they are close relations and

¹ *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic*, pp. 135-136, 379-382.

² *Moeurs et Coutumes des Bantous*, ii, p. 319.

DREAMS

parents. This wickedness of intention is not conscious, but has its origin in the past, when the child was thwarted by those stronger than itself, and found compensation by disposing of the rival in a dream.¹

We may note that, in Africa, many dreams of the death of those near to us are not acceptable to the conscious mind, and are therefore interpreted as signifying some other person whose death is presaged. But dreams of ancestors would not be explicable in this way.

I feel sure that many of the confessions of witchcraft, so bewildering to the matter-of-fact European, have their origin in the dreams of the accused. So many of these supposed witches are elderly women, mothers-in-law, grandmothers, or childless women, whose natural desires can no longer find an outlet, and compensate for that by the hatred that is suppressed in consciousness, but which appears in dreams. Witches are often good-living women, and yet are accused of destroying those dearest to them, it being almost a rule that they cannot hurt those outside of their own family. Here, too, we should place those adulterous dreams, against a man's best self. "The striving for pleasure—the libido, as we say—chooses its objects unchecked by any inhibition, preferring indeed those which are forbidden: not merely the wife of another man, but, above all, the incestuous objects of choice which by common consent humanity holds sacred—the mother and sister of men, the father and the brother of women. . . . Hate, too, rages unrestrainedly; wishes for revenge, and death-wishes, against those who in life are nearest and dearest—parents, brothers, and sisters, husband or wife, the dreamer's own children—are by no means uncommon. These censored wishes seem to rise up from a veritable hell; when we know their meaning, it seems to us in our waking moments as if no censorship of them could be severe enough. Dreams themselves, however, are not to blame for this evil content: you surely have not forgotten that their harmless, nay, useful function is to protect sleep from disturbance."²

The conscious mind is known to exercise a censorship over dreams, so that the psychologist often does not trouble about the surface meaning of the dream, the manifest content, for this is a distorted substitute for the real thing, but by a method of free association he seeks to discover the latent content, the

¹ *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, p. 158.

² *Op. cit.*, pp. 119-120.

original wish that the dream sought to fulfil. African dream interpreters have recognized the necessity of interpreting dreams often by opposites or by symbols; but by no means always, for the dream may appear quite straightforward.

The symbolism expressed in dreams is most important, both because of what they hide, and because of the many parallels of dream symbolism that are found in widely separated countries. "Dreams are symbolic", says Jung, "in order that they cannot be understood, in order that the wish, which is the source of the dream, may remain unknown."¹

The origin of the symbols is shrouded in mystery. Jung has propounded his well-known theory of "archetypes", primordial images which come to us through the "collective unconscious", and furnish the symbolism of our dreams.²

It is remarkable that ancestors are often symbolized in African dreams by animals. There is probably a connexion with totemistic beliefs; also the aggressiveness of animals may correspond to a child's fear of the superior might of adults, as Freud suggests in *Totem and Taboo*. Chiefs are often called in life a lion, or a leopard. The snake is a universal sexual symbol, while the fish is also given by Freud as a male symbol, and in Africa may be taken as a sign of pregnancy. Dreams of water, rivers and seas, recall death and also the mother's womb. The dream of flying is found in Africa, and is interpreted as a good and pleasant thing; Freud attributes it to general sexual excitement.

Other typical dreams, which may be compared with those found in other lands, are the dream of losing teeth, which suggests the death of a beloved one; dreams of falling into a pit, which is interpreted as unfortunate; and that of picking up excreta, which is a good omen, and a money fantasy.

Dr. Layard has tried to find an archetypal figure in the symbolism of the hare, common in folklore and frequent in some dreams. He traces this in Egypt, where there was a hare divinity, sometimes associated with the dawn. The hare is one of the most popular figures of West African folklore, whence came the stories of Brer Rabbit, taken to America by the African slaves. Yet despite this frequent appearance of the hare in fable, there is no evidence for his appearance as a noteworthy symbol in dreams in West Africa.³

¹ *Psychology of the Unconscious*, pp. 4-6.

² *The Integration of the Personality*, E.T., 1940, Ch. III, "Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious".

³ *The Lady of the Hare*, 1944.

DREAMS

The mechanism of the African's mind is not different from our own, it is his environment and tradition that are so different. The interpretations of many dreams, and in particular the notion of a wandering soul, are foreign to the modern European mind. Some of the symbols found are certainly akin to our own, and certain of them might conceivably be based upon ancient types, which have been unconsciously inherited.

There is no evidence of any attempt at suggesting or teaching dream symbolism in West Africa, although there may be a wide diffusion of dream lore, and many diviners interpret the symbols along similar lines. If the dreams are not kept entirely secret, their symbols may be passed on from age to age. Jung's hypothesis may find support, but not full proof, from some African dreams.

CHAPTER 16

THE INFLUENCE OF EGYPT AND ISLAM

BEFORE closing this study of West African beliefs concerning the soul, reference may be made to the broader questions of the influence of Egypt and Islam upon West African thought. Finally, some consideration will be given to the impact of Christianity upon African beliefs, and as to how indigenous faith can best be purged and developed into higher forms of religion.

How far the beliefs and customs of ancient Egypt may have influenced West Africa, is a question still much in debate. Much depends upon the ancient routes of travel and migration, either of clans or of whole tribes. Many tribes, e.g. the eastern Yoruba, have traditions of provenance from the east, which might mean the Nile valley, or even Arabia.¹

As long ago as 1760, C. de Brosses, whom Max Müller called "the inventor of fetishism", tried to draw parallels between African religion and that of ancient Egypt, in his volume *Du Culte des dieux fétiches, ou parallèle de l'ancienne religion de l'Égypte avec la religion actuelle de Nigritie*. In 1824, Bowdich published his *Essay on the Superstitions Common to the Ancient Egyptians, Abyssinians and Ashantis*. And Reindorf, in his *History of the Gold Coast and Ashanti* of 1875, draws a number of parallels between the Egyptians and Ashanti. The great French scholar, Maurice Delafosse, in a memorandum published in *Anthropologie* in 1900, wrote *Sur des traces probables de civilisation égyptienne et d'hommes de race blanche à la Côte d'Ivoire*. More recently, with erudition but unconvincingly, J. J. Williams has followed a cognate thesis in his *Hebrewisms of West Africa, From Nile to Niger with the Jews* (1930). So that it is not surprising that African authors, such as J. B. Danquah, seem almost to take for granted the unproved hypothesis of kinship of West African peoples with the Egyptians or even with the Mesopotamians, both racially and religiously.

Dr. Danquah suggests that the Akan of the Gold and Ivory Coasts originated from or were of the same stock as the Akkad peoples of Mesopotamia. Dr. Williams imagines immigrations

¹ The "Diffusionist" theory of Elliot Smith and W. J. Perry has been little applied to Africa. I have tried to discuss some of the evidence impartially, without dismissing diffusionism as cavalierly as do some writers.

of Jews, either from the west via North Africa, or from the Upper Nile to the east. There seems no solid evidence for either hypothesis. Linguistic evidence is very flimsy.

Others have traced probable routes of communication from the Upper Nile, skirting the tropical forests, and continuing eastwards along the Sudan to the old western Sudanese kingdoms, such as Gao, Ghana, Djéné, Timbuktu; from here infiltration would take place into the southern forests, to the coast of Guinea and the Bight of Benin. The gap of desert between the Upper Nile and the Nigerian Sudan is now impassable except by modern means of transport owing to the lack of water, but there are signs of ancient wells, at intervals, that might have allowed a crossing in the distant past. In any case, Islam reached the western Sudan, either from the east or from the west, and hence there may have been earlier communications, possibly in the pre-dynastic and early dynastic Egyptian periods.

Delafose thought that the great diversity of African languages might be simplified, by discovering an original unity in one linguistic family. Mademoiselle Homburger, a disciple of Delafose, and director of African linguistics in Paris, is one of the latest advocates of Egyptian influence in West Africa. She combats the argument that traces of culture and ideas specifically Egyptian are lacking further south, for modern excavations are producing more and more objects distinctly Egyptian in inspiration, and ethnologists have found on the Zambezi and elsewhere customs that recall some of those described in the papyri. Mlle Homburger concludes that many of the African languages are derived from varying Egyptian and Coptic forms. "The differences of structure and of morphological character between the later forms of Egyptian and the modern Negro languages are very small and represent the continuation of an evolution whose beginning is found in the history of Egyptian itself. . . . Certain groups underwent the influence of Egyptians speaking Coptic dialects, such as the Ewe and the Mande, whence the very reduced forms of these idioms and the remarkable development of those who speak them; other groups are connected with the populations of the oases who already spoke a debased Egyptian in the time of Herodotus; finally, others adopted Nubian forms representing an ancient state of Egyptian which evolved in contact with the mother language, such as the Bantu."¹

¹ *Les Langues Négro-Africaines, et les Peuples qui les parlent*, 1941, pp. 306-307, 336-337.

Professor E. F. Gautier criticizes this as a "simple hypothesis", too simple to account for all the complexity of present-day reality. He points out that there are at least two great blocks in tropical Africa, i.e. Bantu Africa and West Africa, which cannot be forced into one mould. The former may have been more easily in touch with Egypt and the east, the latter are the pure negroes living in a more isolated region. The theory of Gautier himself is that the river Benue, with its deep valley navigable for nearly a thousand miles from the sea, and surrounded by volcanic mountains, is the "hinge" of Africa, separating two quite distinct cultures. "Bantu humanity communicates with the exterior world of old civilizations by the eastern ways of the Nile, the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean. I imagine that this is not contested. Western black Africa has its communications with the western basin of the Mediterranean, directly, across the Sahara." Hence he denies Egyptian influence in West Africa, except very faintly and indirectly, but maintains that there was traffic and influence into West Africa, from the Mediterranean world and North Africa.¹

One would imagine that a river such as the Benue would be a means of communication, rather than a dividing line. It is not proved that the West African peoples derived much culture from North Africa via the western land routes, at least not within historical times or much before the advent of Europeans. Nobody knows whether Hanno's famous odyssey took him as far as Senegal, let alone the Cameroons, or whether it could possibly have had any lasting effect on any West African country. Some of the western Sudanese kingdoms were Islamized, but none appears to have been in continuous touch with Egypt, or to have influenced the negro inhabitants of the Guinea forests.

Dr. C. G. Seligman, in *Egypt and Negro Africa*, draws attention to the similarity of burial customs in the Congo and Nigeria to those of ancient Egypt, and also to resemblances in kingly offices and ritual with some of the practices of Egypt. In his larger work, he indicates some Egyptian cultural traits that are found in the eastern Sudan, but suggests that there are even more near to the great lakes and on the Congo. He affirms that Egyptian influence continued southward for millenia, but admits that evidence for this penetration is hard to come by. The Egyptian pressure was not steady, and there is evidence of maxima and minima of influence. There appears to have been

¹ *L'Afrique Noire Occidentale*, 1943, pp. 14-15, 95-97.

an early maximum in the days of the pyramids or of the Old Kingdom. Until the pyramid age, it is evident that the spread was from Egypt to the Sudan, and not the reverse, for it is not until after this period that negroes are found in Egyptian representational art. Even this, of course, refers only to the eastern Sudan, and not to West Africa.¹

Dr. C. K. Meek has made much of the resemblances of certain West African practices to some of those of Egypt, in his series of works on Nigerian tribes. He draws special attention to the burial rites and royal ceremonies, where indeed there are some striking parallels with Egyptian ways.

I have referred a number of times to possible comparisons that may be made between practices and beliefs extant in West Africa, with those known to have existed in Egypt. It is worth while drawing attention to these similarities, but that does not in any way prove that West Africans originated from Egypt, unless it be very remotely in pre-dynastic times, when both may have drawn from a common source. Most of the parallels that are drawn could apply to pre-dynastic Egypt, and this would mean either a much more ancient infiltration of Egyptian customs than is commonly postulated, or a common source from which both pre-dynastic Egyptians and the ancestors of the West Africans drew their beliefs, each developing independently of the other after a common beginning.

Captain Rattray, in his study of the tribes of the Ashanti hinterland, to which we have referred a number of times, found that these tribes often had traditions of origin from the east, but that this applied only to their ruling castes, who were foreigners who had imposed their rule on an aboriginal population. The same may have happened on a much wider scale and at more distant periods of time in West Africa. There may have been immigrations of ruling races, who dominated and eventually mingled with the local inhabitants.²

If some of the West African tribes, or their ruling families, did migrate to their present abode from the east, it must surely have been at a much earlier epoch than those which are usually suggested. A few simple illustrations from everyday life will make this clear. Even the more advanced West African coastal tribes, e.g. Yoruba, Ewe, Akan, while adepts at pottery, yet

¹ *Pagan Tribes of the Nilotic Sudan*, pp. 34-36.

² There is undoubtedly considerable duality of organization in parts of West Africa; whether or not one take this as a certain indication of Egyptian influence, as in the theory of W. J. Perry: *The Growth of Civilization*, Ch. V, 1924, and *Children of the Sun*, Ch. XVIII, 1923.

have no knowledge of the potter's wheel, or of any other sort of wheel. Cultivators of the soil, they have no acquaintance with even the most primitive type of plough, all the ground being turned over by hand hoes. For grinding corn they have no mills, but rub stones together by hand, or use a hand mortar and pestle. Boats are mere dug-outs. Writing is entirely absent, the only signs known to non-Islamic tribes being the single or double strokes drawn in the Ifa divining system. Since the wheel, the potter's wheel, the plough, and writing have been known in Egypt and Mesopotamia for about five thousand years, and are such elementary and useful inventions that migrating clans would hardly discard or entirely forget them, it would seem that any migration must have taken place in pre-dynastic times, or from the Upper Nile, not directly from Egypt.¹ This would not preclude some later, small clan migrations, such as that of the glassmakers of Nupe.

Much that has been discovered about the pre-dynastic Egyptians could be written almost equally as well of some West Africans, up to the last century. The pre-dynastic Egyptians seem to have been an indigenous people of North Africa, whose chief occupations were fishing and hunting. They were skilled potters: some pots are ornamented with linear designs and paintings, some are bi-coloured, red and black; but they knew nothing of the potter's wheel. Their houses were made of reeds daubed with mud, or were rough huts with mud walls; no trace of these remains, for they knew nothing of brickmaking, like West Africans until the present century. Their graves contain no inscriptions, for they were ignorant of the art of writing. Bodies were buried in the embryonic position, usually lying on the left side, with the head to the south; earthenware vessels were placed in the graves, together with weapons and implements; thus denoting belief in a future life. There was no attempt at mummifying the corpses. These people seem to have worn no clothing, except ruling families who made drawers of goat- and deer-skin, like many tribes south of the western Sudan today. The tail of the animal whose skin was used for this clothing, hung down behind, and this feature was retained in later Egypt, as in parts of West Africa. They tattooed their bodies with lines and animal figures, as do many West Africans, and probably had totemistic beliefs. The bone

¹ Unless knowledge of such crafts were restricted to certain groups, which suffered a steep "cultural degradation": cf. Perry, *Growth of Civilization*, Ch. III, *Children of the Sun*, pp. 469 ff.

combs which they used much resemble those wooden ones sold in countless West African markets. Ostriches' eggs were highly esteemed, and these are still found decorating houses in West Africa, as also churches and mosques in the Sudan and Abyssinia.

The religious beliefs of the pre-dynastic Egyptians provided the foundation for the later Egyptian religion, which was based upon the indigenous African rather than upon Asiatic religion. The first dynasty adds the iconic representation of religion, Osiris being fashioned in much the same way as he was later, and bull worship being strongly developed. The fundamentals of later Egyptian religion are sketched by Sir Wallis Budge as: belief in an immortal soul, with recognition of friends after death; resurrection of a spiritual body, wherein the soul lived after death; belief in continuation of heart, soul, double, and shadow; transmutation of offerings, and efficacy of sacrifices; belief in efficacious words, names and magical formulae; judgment after death, the good receiving everlasting felicity, and the evil being annihilated. "All the above appear to be indigenous African beliefs, which existed in the Pre-dynastic Period, and are current under various forms at the present day among most of the tribes of the Sudan who have any religious belief at all".¹

Not only in Egypt, but higher up the Nile, similar ideas prevailed, at a much later date. Meroitic religion, in the Greco-Roman period, while including many of the Egyptian gods, shows no sign of the practice of mummification; ideas of heaven appear to be much more material than the spiritual heaven of Ra; scenes of the Judgment show the acceptance of weighing the heart in a balance, but omit the other details that are prominent in Egyptian papyri.²

Reference may now be made to the Egyptian ideas concerning the nature of the soul. The available evidence comes chiefly from the *Book of the Dead*, and the ideas are several and complex. But there seems little doubt that the concepts found in the *Book of the Dead*, concerning the constituent parts of the spiritual and material bodies, do not all date from the same period, but they represent various stages of development which cannot now be precisely determined. There are contradictions in the texts, which show that the Egyptians themselves were not always clear as to the functions of each member of the personality.

¹ *Book of the Dead*, pp. ccv-ccvi; *A History of Egypt*, ii, pp. 5-7.

² E. A. W. Budge, *History of Ethiopia*, i, pp. 88-96.

In the *Book of the Dead*, says Budge, there is first the physical body (*khat*), which decayed unless mummified, then what is generally called the "double" (*ka*), which was an abstract personality, like the man to whom it was attached, dwelling in the tomb with the body, but able to wander about and enter a statue of the man; it was to feed this *ka* that offerings were placed in the tomb, lest it should be forced to leave the sepulchre and eat offal. The *ka* had the same features, gait and dress as the man, but was generally smaller in size. This double was born with man, grew and declined with him. All men, animals, and plants had their double. It was invisible to mortal eyes, but priests could perceive the doubles of gods, and so gain knowledge of past and future. Sometimes the double flew from men in life, leaving them in trance.

The heart-soul (*ba*) was connected with the *ka*, sometimes as dwelling with it in the tomb and sharing offerings, sometimes as in heaven with Ra and Osiris. It is depicted as a human-headed hawk, flying down with food for the body. The heart (*ab*) was close to this soul, and was the source of life, and of good and evil. It was very important to preserve the heart, as in the Judgment it was specially examined as centre of spiritual life, and in some sense a "conscience". The heart could be stolen by witches, and chapters of the *Book of the Dead* deal with the prevention of this.

The shadow (*Khaibit*) was close to the soul; like the double it fed on the grave offerings, and could wander about at will. The spiritual soul (*khu*) seems to have been an ethereal being, a soul which could not die, and which dwelt in the spiritual body (*sahu*). This spiritual body sprang from the material body, through prayers and ceremonies performed by the priests, and was incorruptible. It united the spiritual attributes of the material body with new powers of its own.

The power (*sekhem*) was like a personification of the man's vital force; dwelling in heaven with the spiritual soul, it was connected with soul and spirit. The name (*ren*) was preserved with great care, for it was thought that if the name was extinguished the person ceased to exist. Hence the filial care given to preserve the names of parents, and offerings coupled with mention of the parents' names to keep them in existence.¹

In view of the established fact that the Egyptian ideas concerning the soul, as they have come to us through the *Book of the Dead*, are composite and dated from various eras, we

¹ *Book of the Dead*, pp. lix-lxiv; *Golden Bough*, i, pp. 247 ff.

should not expect to find parallels to all of them in West African beliefs. As some of them certainly date from pre-dynastic times, it cannot be surely assumed that West African ideas are derived from Egypt. Both may come from a much more primitive level of ideas, current in prehistoric Africa, as in other parts of the world.

The reader will have noted, however, some Egyptian conceptions of the soul which resemble some of those current in West Africa. The personality-soul of man may be compared with the *ba* or *ab*, which could be stolen by witches. The spiritual soul is like the *khu*; the *ka* might be compared with the genius or over-soul of Africa.

The physical body has not the same attention paid to it after death in West Africa, though there are some sporadic traces which suggest elementary mummification or embalming, usually of chiefs, in Nigeria, Dahomey, and upper Gold and Ivory Coasts. The royal corpse is dried over a fire, or peeled of its skin. Some tribes, notably the Gū of Dahomey, practise skull-removal, a much more ancient relic of pre-dynastic Egyptian practice.¹ In West Africa, the heart is often given as the source of thought and feeling, while the blood is very important, but not as a conscience. The shadow is not generally thought to subsist after death. The power is a vital force associated with man, but not a separate entity. The name is important, and is kept alive by funerary gifts, and even more by reincarnation. The belief in reincarnation plays a role in West Africa vastly greater than that which obtained in Egypt, until very late times. This is a striking difference between the two cultures.

ISLAMIC INFLUENCE

Other forces may have played upon West African beliefs, much nearer than whatever may have come from the direction of Egypt in its different epochs. Christianity in its various forms, and especially Islām, may have sent out tentacles. Allusion has been made to the effort of J. J. Williams to show Hebrew influence right into West Africa; but the evidence is so slender and hypothetical that it need not be considered here, and those interested may be referred to the work itself.

There are very few customs which might suggest early

¹ Cf. Budge, *Introduction to the Book of the Dead*, p. xxvii. But Prof. Elliot Smith asserts that in West Africa "the technical procedures in the practice of mummification are those which were not adopted in Egypt until the time of the XXIst Dynasty".—*Migrations of Early Culture*, p. 63.

Christian influence. Whatever dispersion of Christianity may have resulted from the Muhammadan invasion of North Africa, in the seventh century of our era, the signs of it today are very doubtful. Some of the tribes of northern Nigeria, which have a seven-day week, rest from farm work both on Fridays (the Muhammadan holy day) and on Sunday, and Sunday is thought to be the best day for offering sacrifice. This is suggestive, but little more positive than the Akan observance of Saturday for prayer to the supreme God, from which Williams deduces Hebrew influence in the ancient Gold Coast.

Those forms of Christianity which have survived nearest to negro Africa, such as in Abyssinia, do not appear to have affected greatly other African countries. The Abyssinians practise circumcision, like Jews and Muhammadans, and this custom is observed by some West African tribes (e.g. Yoruba, Bariba), and little or not at all by others (Ewe, Akan). But it is an ancient rite, whose origin is far older than Judaism and is lost in the mists of prehistory. Magical practices are rife in Abyssinia, but they do not appear to have come from Egypt, but rather to have been borrowed by the Abyssinians themselves from their negro neighbours to the south.

As to Abyssinian ideas of the soul, there is little that is distinctive, or that is comparable with the beliefs of many negro tribes. They believe that the souls of the righteous do not go direct to God at death, but await the Judgment in a place of rest. The wicked have no rest, but wander to and fro distractedly. After the general resurrection and Judgment the wicked go to hell, and the blessed to the kingdom of God. There is no belief in purgatory, but prayers for the dead are common. Rituals for the dead arrived in Abyssinia in the Coptic reform of the thirteenth century, but the forms used today are more recent.¹

The Coptic Church itself never appears to have extended its influence into West Africa. It has been extremely conservative, and being surrounded by a conservative Muhammadanism, it has been enmeshed in associations which were inimical to progress. It is difficult to find any distinctive ideas of the soul, except some slight references in manuscripts, which describe the separation of the soul from the body at death, and its transport by an angel to heaven.²

¹ *History of Ethiopia*, pp. 157-163, 581-583.

² S. Lane-Poole, *History of Egypt in the Middle Ages*; R. de Rustafjaell, *The Light of Egypt*; L. Homburger, *op. cit.*

One would have thought that Islam would have produced a greater effect on pagan African beliefs than is apparent. Strangely enough, this effect seems to have been remarkably small, in the past, except in the very nearest tribes to Islam and in those which have been half-converted to the Muhammadan faith. Even where western states accepted Islam officially, there have remained minorities who have continued in full paganism.¹

The narrow Kharijite sect spread slowly down East Africa centuries ago, and northwards into Algeria. More tolerant Muslims occupied North Africa, and crossed into Spain. Most West African Muslims today belong either to the Tidjani sect, or to the more ancient Malikites.

Muhammadan ideas of the soul have varied, and do not appear to have affected African beliefs; rather the reverse has not infrequently happened. The earlier Islamic idea divided the soul into vegetative, animal and reasonable. Some of the philosophers and sufis (e.g. Ibn Sabi'n) added on two souls derived from the reasonable soul: the soul of wisdom and the soul of prophecy, the latter being the highest of all. The soul was regarded as a spiritual substance, unlike all other things and coming from God; sometimes it was spoken of as little different from God in kind, an emanation which returned to him at death. Al-Ghazzali, the most influential thinker of Islam, taught that the soul of man is different from all other created things; it is a spiritual substance, without corporeality or locality. It is neither inside nor outside the body; it is created but not shaped, for it belongs to the spiritual world. During sleep and trance the soul can get into touch with the world from whence it came. "Sleep is the brother of death", said Al-Ghazzali long before Shelley; hence the soul wanders in sleep, and saints and seers attain their divine knowledge through ecstasy.²

Many of the flights of fancy of the philosophers passed by the crowd, and their pantheism was proscribed. But some of the beliefs concerning the soul express widespread notions, certain of them doubtless older than Islam. The Moors of North Africa today think that the soul wanders from the body during sleep, as the Koran suggests, and they believe their dream experiences to be reality. The soul of the departed is not thought to go away at once after death, and even when this

¹ Cf. J. Beraud-Villars, *L'Empire de Gao*, 1942, pp. 22-23.

² D. B. Macdonald, *Development of Muslim Theology*, pp. 261-264, 215-234.

has occurred it may return at times to join in meals given by its friends. From Morocco to India, Muslims think that the soul stays near the body after death for a short period, from three to forty days, and then goes to the limbo where it stays until the general resurrection. The departed souls are thought to visit their homes every week, invisibly though they can see their relatives. The Moors also believe that the saints can appear in human or animal form, but ordinary dead people do not walk as ghosts.¹

Where Islam has penetrated into African thought, it has been confronted with the current distinction of the personality-soul and the spirit. Instead of abolishing this distinction, a mixed belief has been formed. In the Fulani and Toucouleur language groups, it is the vital principle or breath-soul, rather than the shadow-image, which goes to God or hell after Judgment. This is generally agreed, but there is diversity of belief about the fate of the shadow-image. Some believe that it wanders about until the general resurrection; all concur in thinking that during life it can wander about, be attacked by witches, and be so closely connected with the body that when it is affected the body becomes ill. The Nupe life-soul is that part which lives with man and may be eaten by witches, while the shadow-soul may be separated from the body during sleep.

That such indigenous beliefs subsist even among Islamized tribes will show that there is a strong substratum of African thought, that has resisted Muhammadan pressure over the centuries. Much more, then, have other tribes remained unaffected by Islam, in proportion to their distance from its direct scope. Muhammadanism has changed the public worship of those tribes which it has converted, but even there private and magical practices have remained, especially on points that are not covered by official dogma.

It is only today that Islam has begun to spread with any rapidity among the coastal peoples of West Africa, most clearly among the Yoruba, little as yet among Ewe and Akan; although, in my own experience, I have seen mosques spring up in numerous villages along the Atlantic coast, where fifteen years ago there were scarcely any at all. Christianity has even receded in some places, having been insecurely rooted, and its arm of education no longer proving so effective in conversion. Previous to this, it seems that the only possibly Muhammadan influence among Yoruba and Ewe was the Ifa system of divina-

¹ Westermarck, *op. cit.*

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tion, which is very popular but has lost any trace of connexion with Muhammadan mythology.

Previous to the establishment of European government, and the making of modern roads, the tropical forest was sufficient barrier to keep off even the Sudanese from the coast. Hence we cannot claim that there has hitherto been much influence of Islam on West African indigenous religion and psychology.

These geographical facts, which proved such a hindrance to militant and easily acceptable Islam, should make us pause before assuming a great extent of Egyptian influence. Rather would there seem to be a much deeper and more ancient common source for the beliefs of both Egypt and West Africa.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF RELIGION

AFRICA is changing. The impact of European forms of government over the whole of West Africa, the invasion of Western commerce, the evangelization of Christianity, all these have thrown the continent into a ferment. The change is inevitable. It has happened, and the clock cannot be put back. One might paint idyllic pictures of sylvan tranquillity in the past centuries, contrasted with the disintegration of today. They would be visions, seen through the rose-tinted spectacles of the romantic European; reactions from erstwhile descriptions of cities of blood and slavery. There was both good and bad in the old regime, but it cannot return; the future must be vastly different. European contact has brought good and bad also. The task of those who care for Africa is to endeavour to guide the change, to mitigate the evil, and to reinforce the good.

African religion is changing; in its outward manifestations, and more slowly in its psychological outlook. This is much more true in the coastal towns and trading centres, where Europeans have been longer and more deeply established. In many country districts, and among the older people, religious and psychological beliefs continue very much as for centuries past. The young people, who have flocked to the towns, and who will eventually shape the future, have already absorbed much of the European's way of life and some of his mentality. Not only have many been converted to Christianity or been taught in mission schools, but many more have come to adopt the language, if not always the spirit, of the European.

Conceptions of religion, and even more of psychology, have perforce to be derived from the older people, if one is to obtain purely indigenous thought. The mixture of indigenous and European, which the younger generation presents, is syncretistic and confusing; each man interpreting for himself. Such a mixture is certainly an important feature of the contemporary scene, but it is exceedingly difficult to study, or to present in any systematic way. Moreover, the psychological outlook of the people changes more slowly than the external religious practices, and persists long after conversion to a more modern faith.

In this final chapter, I wish to suggest briefly some ways

in which African religion and thought might be guided in their development. This might have been done at the conclusion of my previous book, but I was hesitant then about embarking upon such a debatable subject, and preferred for the time being to keep strictly to the factual presentation of the religion. Now I have been urged to make some suggestions, but what is said is strictly personal and does not affect the data given so far in this study of the African soul. I must emphasize the fact that these are personal suggestions, not an exhaustive programme; I am writing particularly of belief, religious and psychological.

It has been disputed whether it is possible to make any development at all from African religion to Christian faith, whether any continuity, or even comparison, is possible between such disparate religious beliefs and ways of life. This was not only the old-fashioned and "fundamentalist" point of view, which regarded all religions as evil, and their "idol-gods" as emissaries from the Devil. Thanks to the teaching of the Swiss theologian Karl Barth, this iconoclastic dogma has sprung to new life, and has powerfully affected the outlook of missionaries from the Continent and some from America; no doubt largely in reaction from the extreme modernist theology of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Karl Barth, in the second volume of his huge *Dogmatik*, declares roundly that "there is no point of contact" between Christianity and any other religion; and even that other religions are "sin", they are "the work of godless man".

In a modified form, the Barthian doctrine moulds the teaching of a very influential missionary book, written especially for the World Missionary Conference of 1938, Dr. Kraemer's *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World*. The writer condemns the ancient doctrine of natural theology, declaring that "the Roman Catholic conception of 'natural theology' is therefore from the standpoint of revelation a failure and an error. The unique character of Biblical religion, which it intends to maintain, is imprudently sacrificed to the exigencies of all-inclusive harmonistic thinking". He regards all the other religions of the world as "naturalistic religions of trans-empirical realization", which cryptic phrase we are told in a footnote means that all non-Semites try to identify themselves with the divine. Therefore Christianity, it is asserted, "is antagonistic to all human religious aspirations and ends",

because the latter seek to possess God, to realize our divine nature.¹

Discounting the vapourings, it is nevertheless astonishing that these theologians, while rightly maintaining the uniqueness of New Testament revelation, should include the Old Testament and impose the whole unexpurgated book upon the believer, in the name of "Biblical realism". One result of modern study has been to show, indeed, how many "points of contact" there really are between the Old Testament and much of primitive religion; traces of totemism, ancestor-worship, animism, magic, demonology.² Indeed, it may be considered a pity that the whole Bible has been imported, without curtailment or commentary, into so many African languages, where many Old Testament passages lend themselves so easily to misapplication, in both religion and morality; e.g. polygamy and the imprecatory Psalms. Two hundred years ago, John Wesley said of the latter that they were "highly improper for the mouths of a Christian congregation".

The Barthian theologians have found strange allies in some of the adherents of the "functional" school of social anthropology, founded by Dr. Malinowski, who regard religion as such an integral part of the social structure that it cannot be changed, unless the whole society is overthrown and replaced. This has been recently expressed by W. H. Newell: "The Barthian point of view which denies general revelation outside Christianity is reinforced from anthropology, because such teaching as that of Confucius on the family can no longer be regarded as pre-Christian by the grace of God, but as presenting the family as an essential unit in a certain form of social structure. The fact that certain common beliefs resemble certain concepts in Christianity is merely a superficial accident and cannot be used as a basis of evangelization without a very grave danger of obscuring the Christian message."³

One might conclude from this doctrine of the function of religion in society that comparisons cannot be drawn between one religion and another, for there are always differences of en-

¹ *Op. cit.*, pp. 115, 143n, 123. I criticized this teaching in an article in the *Expository Times* in 1939. There was considerable opposition to Kraemer's point of view at the World Missionary Conference, notably from Indian and Chinese delegates.

² See Frazer, *Folklore in the Old Testament*; Oesterley and Robinson, *Hebrew Religion*.

³ "'Functional' Social Anthropology and Christian Missionary Method," in the *International Review of Missions*, vol. xxxvi, p. 256; see for a review of Malinowski, Max Gluckman, in *Africa*, vol. xvii, pp. 103-121.

vironment; and there could be no points of contact, nor any development of the lower into the higher. The task of comparative religion and anthropology would then be restricted entirely to description. But we may object that while description is invaluable, yet it isolates and makes unreal the religion unless some comparisons are made with other religions, and some points found for development. The fact is that development is going on today, in Africa as elsewhere.

It is true that the village African tradition and environment are very different from those of the modern European city-dweller. But not only is the Christian faith an Asiatic creed, but the attitude to life of modern Europeans is vastly different from that of the average Briton of a century ago. As we have developed, so has our understanding of our religion. It may seem strange to us to realize the extent of the belief in witchcraft in Africa today, when the idea has almost entirely vanished from our own society. But that abolition of the superstition is the work of less than a century of universal education. As Julian Huxley says, in *Africa View*, we cannot fairly compare the mental capacity of the African with our own, until he has had at least three generations of universal education, and that ideal is still a very distant prospect even in the most advanced colonies.

One of the most important differences between religious and intellectual life in Africa and that of Europe is the African's lack of a sense of historical fact. Dr. Otto has made the same observation concerning the Bhakti cult in India. Christianity being essentially a historical religion, its book and creeds depending upon historical facts, it contrasts both with those religions which dismiss history as illusory, and with those which do not distinguish historical fact from hearsay and myth.¹ But this again is a matter for education, at least as far as Africa is concerned, where there is no other worldly philosophy. There are many elements in religion, too, which do not depend upon history, but upon nature and human experience; it is only the legendary that needs to fear historical enquiry.

How, then, can African religion best develop, so that it does not entirely disintegrate, before a sounder faith has grown up; lest seven worse devils come in and the last state be worse than the first?

It has often been remarked, not infrequently unkindly and unfairly, that the first result of Christianity upon the African

¹ *India's Religion of Grace*, E.T., 1930.

who accepts it is to lower his standard of behaviour. Many traders will say that the mission schools spoil the African, and that they prefer a bush pagan to a school-taught houseboy. It may be true that the Christian knows too much, and cannot be bullied like an ignorant pagan. But that is not the whole answer; it must be admitted also that too often in the past the beliefs of the African have been ridiculed and destroyed. We have knocked the bottom out of his life, and upset not only religious, but also moral sanctions. Having come to think that his elders were pagan fools, the young African, unless very wisely guided and thoroughly imbued with a better faith, lowers his standards of morality both to his own hurt and to that of society. It would be better to teach that we are aiming at similar, and even better, results than his own traditional teachers, and to be much more patient in seeking to win the confidence of the old and of the leaders of society.

"I came not to destroy, but to fulfil." This is sometimes quoted; but it is difficult to know which elements may be retained, or purged for fulfilment. Most West African peoples believe in a supreme Being, albeit rather a distant creator. This is about the only part of the faith that missions have taken over, undoubtedly enriching it from Christian doctrine, and influencing many beyond the confines of definite Church life. But since no more than the name of the God is used, it is a very minute point of contact.

African belief has been classified in four categories: belief in a supreme Being, belief in lesser gods and divine spirits, belief in ancestors who receive some cult, and belief in charms and magic ("fetish"). It is agreed that as the first belief in God is to be retained, so the last trust in and use of charms is to be abolished. This is easier said than done, and magical practices tend to persist even when belief in higher spiritual beings has changed or disappeared. We see this in our own land, with the prevalence of quack remedies, lucky mascots, and horoscopes; some of these are exported to Africa, where they come to be regarded as the white man's occult secrets and clues to his power. Similarly, in Africa, belief in witchcraft is on the increase, in those places where the ancestral religion has lost its grip. Misfortune, natural catastrophies, disease, unsuccessful work, all tend increasingly to be put down to the maleficent activity of witches; particularly in towns, and among the half-educated.

One principal remedy for such hopes and fears of magic

would be more thorough education in knowledge of the natural forces of the world, the teaching of elementary scientific fact, and above all the great extension of medical services. When one realizes that some colonies of West Africa even today have not a single public latrine, not a plough, nearly all water drawn from filthy wells, crippling the population with guinea worm, and that after more than fifty years of European government, it is not marvellous that the people still live in the belief that witches or evil spirits cause malaria instead of mosquitoes, and that dirt is not seen to have any connexion with disease.

Dr. Mair says that it is time to teach religion more scientifically. She agrees that only Christianity can replace effectively the religions of tropical Africa, but maintains that this need not be identical with the Christianity of European nations. Religion must advance in the social field, and combat the self-seeking and materialism that menace African society in the new areas.¹ All this is true, and important. But it does not follow that one should abandon Christian dogma, in favour of a system of materialistic ethics. If this were done, it would no longer be Christianity, or even religion. For it is established by modern scholars that the most primitive Christianity, and the teaching of Jesus, was fully based upon and thoroughly impregnated with a positive belief in a personal God, working in the world to reveal himself and establish his kingdom. Christian ethics are spiritual and supernatural. They do not teach the enlightened self-interest which is the product of agnostic moralists, but the love of virtue and the fruits of the Spirit that spring from devotion to God. But Christian ethics are not merely other-worldly, and Christians must not be so preoccupied with dogma and opinion that they neglect social action.

Vital and practical religious belief is a necessity for the life of the African, as for every other man. We must continue the consideration of African belief.

The two remaining categories of religion are the cult of the ancestors and the worship of the gods. Rattray puts in a strong plea for tolerance of the former practice, because of the predominant part that the ancestral cult plays in Ashanti religion, and the respect owed to elders which it embodies. "I think the most critical enquirers must have failed to find anything inherently objectionable in the *Adae* ceremonies—those ceremonial occasions when ancestors are called to mind. . . . The

¹ *An African People*, pp. 264-265.

time-immemorial respect shown to the 'House father', developing at a later date into the traditional respect for those in authority over the larger group, had its roots in reverence for and remembrance of the dead. The firm belief that the departed continue to take a lively interest in the affairs of their descendants bound the people together and enabled them to attain to a considerable standard of culture. Propitiation of ancestors has been and still is an essential part of the whole social system, and the foundation of unity, respect, and obedience to those in authority in the family group, which is really the basis of all civilization."¹

Not all will agree that the ancestral ceremonies are unexceptionable, from a Christian point of view. But Rattray considers that Europeans often suffer from thanatophobia; they are afraid of thinking about death and the departed, being at once more materially-minded and less realistic than the African. There is no doubt that the thought of the ever-living fathers, the great cloud of witnesses in which our Christian forefathers believed also, is very real to nearly all Africans. The psychological study *Black Hamlet* reveals the sense of the ancestors to be the most fundamental influence in the mind of the African.

Our study of the soul has shown how important is its future destiny, and while part of the man returns to earth, yet the ancestor continues to live in the beyond and receives offerings. This is a spiritual belief. Junod says that the Thonga cannot understand the resurrection of the body. When one is told the story of the resurrection of the flesh, he replies sceptically: "The goat dies, it rots; the bull dies, it rots; the man dies, he rots." One must commend the common sense of the Thonga, and deplore the teaching that would suggest a general resurrection of the flesh, instead of the orthodox Pauline doctrine of resurrection in a spiritual body.²

Two points arise. Is the African ancestral cult correctly termed "worship"? Is invocation of the departed incompatible with Christianity?

It is maintained sometimes that it is a misinterpretation to consider the ancestral cult as worship, on the same plane as the worship rendered to divine beings and to the supreme God. In reality, it is said, the title of worship is a misnomer. The pious descendant comes to his forefather with a gift in his hand,

¹ *Ashanti Law and Constitution*, pp. 399-400.

² *Moeurs et Coutumes des Bantous*, ii, p. 319.

as he must always do when approaching an earthly chief, a token of respect and a guarantee of a hearing. It is, nevertheless, true that there is not a strict dividing line between the elder ancestors, who tend to be apotheosized, and the gods some of whom are spoken of as if they were once ancestors. But this does not apply to all ancestral petitions, and African languages have different words for departed human spirits and for gods.

The difference between pagan practices, and the prayers of some Christians associated with the departed, has been said to consist in that pagans pray *to* the dead, while the early Christians, at least, prayed *for* the dead. The belief in intercession, not only by living friends, but by departed saints was known in Biblical times. In Jeremiah (15: 1) it is written, "Though Moses and Samuel stood before me, yet my mind could not be toward this people"; hence the idea of saintly intercession was not unknown. The great development of this idea in Roman Catholicism has led to the "cults" of the saints and of Mary, wherein, in the popular mind at least, the saints are prayed to to help their petitioners; though no doubt in strict Catholic theory this is not worship, and the saint is not prayed to in the way in which God is worshipped, but is besought to help by his prayers those of the suppliant.¹

In early Christianity prayer *to* the dead was sharply reprobated, notably by S. Augustine. But as early as Tertullian (A.D. 200), long tradition and current practice are quoted by this puritanical writer, in support of prayers and oblations made *for* the departed. Such ancient authority, before the first councils, carries considerable weight.

To many Protestants, the idea of prayers for the dead has become strange and savouring of popery, though there always have been Protestants, such as Samuel Johnson, who have maintained it. Strong arguments are put forward by the Presbyterian Dr. Leckie for permissive use of prayers for the dead, and belief in an intermediate state beyond, among Protestants. Since our own theology may be thus in need of enrichment, lest it lose all value for the bereaved, it may be well not to dogmatize too heavily about African practices.²

It may be suggested that Africans might be less shocked, and their moral foundations less disturbed, if they were led to believe that their ancestors could be remembered before

¹ S. Reinach, *Cults, Myths, and Religions*, pp. 107-109.

² *The World to Come and Final Destiny*, pp. 99-102; see also the Methodist J. Bretherton, *Progress in Heaven*.

God, and not neglected altogether. Some missionary teaching has seemed to doom, outright and for ever, those ancestors who have never even had the chance of hearing the Gospel. Protestantism may need to recover what its fathers threw away in their reaction against corrupt practice. Catholics need to beware, lest their customs be taken as favouring polytheism. We are all supposed to believe in the cloud of witnesses. If prayer for, and not to, the dead were permitted, then the best element in the ancestral cult might be retained.

Rattray also puts in a plea for the nature gods. "Animism may seem to be a difficult and dangerous path to tread and one almost wholly incompatible with Christian teaching. There is something, however, in the old Ashanti belief in a 'living universe' that, coupled with modern scientific knowledge, should go to produce a blending of the scientific outlook with a love of, and understanding and communion with, Nature, which to me seems much to be preferred to an ultra-material and purely scientific outlook upon life."¹

Extreme caution is needed here, for one thing because the worship of the gods is often no longer animism, but a highly developed polytheism, with temples and trained priests. The worship of the gods no doubt developed out of the awe of natural forces, personified and increased by the inclusion of divinized ancestors.

Three suggestions may be made. Firstly, the teaching of scientific fact will eventually undermine belief in the power of the priests to determine natural events and forces; this is already happening where inoculation against smallpox removes the sanction of the god of the disease. Secondly, some of the gods may become assimilated to the ancestors, and revered as national heroes; such as Shāngo, the Yoruba king and thunder god. Thirdly, an active belief in the immanence of God, and the presence of the Holy Spirit, would fill the gap left in the religious life of the people. The Christian doctrine of the Trinity arose out of Christian experience, faced on the one hand by the rigidity of Hebrew monotheism or deism, and on the other by the uncontrolled exuberance of Greek polytheism. A similar situation faces the Church today in Africa, where the extremes of Islam and polytheism might find a true and nobler middle way in Christian faith, imaginatively interpreted. Only it must be the Christian faith, in its richest sense, and neither superstition nor diluted agnosticism.

¹ *Loc. cit.*

Africans have often a richer idea of God than the deism which is the unspoken creed of many Europeans. Aggrey delighted in speaking of the supreme Being as Father-Mother God, and made known one Akan title of "The Nursing-Mother-God". The Ibo are noted for their belief in Mother Earth, and use statues that resemble the Madonna and Child.¹

Room must be found for this richer, warmer conception of the deity, if polytheism is to be outmoded, alien though it may seem to our respectable, mediocre piety. Roman Catholic cults of Mary may appear more akin to the African worship. Nevertheless, caution is needed lest, to justify worship, mythology is introduced that has no historical foundation, and that therefore might eventually be liable to the same kind of attack as is being now made on the African's unhistorical legends about his gods. Christianity has special interest in remaining faithful to historical fact.²

As regards points of contact with African conceptions of the soul, we have seen how complex is the subject. It is the personality-soul which would seem to correspond most closely to what we understand by the soul. This needs to be remembered in Biblical translation. But we shall fail if we give the impression that we seek to save the soul only. The whole personality should come within the scope of religion; despite his firm belief in a world to come, the African's religion is this-worldly, and seeks the enrichment of all the powers of this present mortal being.

The spirit, and the guardian genius, may be hard to fit in with modern doctrine; but we might do worse than revive the old and orthodox doctrine of guardian angels, which is explicit in the Gospels (Matthew 18: 10).

Christianity will, of course, have much to contribute and to clarify in the doctrine of the state of the soul in the world to come; provided that we do not assign the great majority of mankind to an everlasting hell-fire. Time will be needed before the disappearance of beliefs in metamorphosis, which are so intimately bound up with totemism.

Perhaps the most foreign conception to Christianity, yet deeply rooted in African thought, is that of reincarnation. Yet it is strange how many modern Europeans toy with this notion,

¹ E. W. Smith, *Aggrey of Africa*, 1929, p. 31; *Peoples of Southern Nigeria*, ii, pp. 43 ff.

² See the caution recommended on this point, by Bishop Gore, *The Reconstruction of Belief*, p. 281n.

derived from India via theosophy, while multitudes of other Europeans profess to find it hard to accept the one Incarnation which has been the traditional teaching of the Church. Some have tried to fit the notion of reincarnation into psychological hypotheses, such as a "subliminal self", based on the saying of William James that there is more life in our total soul than we are ever aware of; therefore it has been suggested that some other portion of our self may reincarnate.

It seems that the belief in reincarnation arose from the likeness of a child to an ancestor. There seems to be no other evidence to support it. The most that one might say in favour is that there subsists a physical, perhaps even a spiritual, influence of the ancestor in the child. In African belief the ancestor is generally thought to continue to exist in the after-world, as well as to be reborn partly in his grandchild; the more advanced say that the ancestor simply leaves his influence, or force, with one or more descendants. It may be noted that some tribes, on adopting Islam, have rejected belief in reincarnation, although they may still maintain that this power, and metamorphosis, existed in the days of their forefathers.

Such fine sentiments of sympathy for African faith may read well, but it is difficult to put them into practice. But one remembers, among a number of other kindly Christians, the constant attitude of the veteran Monseigneur Steinmetz in Dahomey. During his fifty years' mission he continually sought to practise charity and toleration. When the cathedral of Ouidah was built, pagans and Christians shared in the labour and the expense. We know of others who have rudely refused similar co-operation, on the ground that it sullied the purity and the "offence" of the Gospel; the offence really lay on their own lack of charity. One of Steinmetz's most loyal supporters was a priest of the python cult, of which a temple faces the cathedral. This priest did not become a Christian for many years, but the good bishop did not condemn him or seek to force him unduly, but encouraged him to attend Christian worship without renouncing his traditional faith. Only on his death-bed was the priest won to Christianity, but Ouidah is today a stronghold of the faith.^{*} One only wishes the same charity could be attributed to all priests and pastors.

It is much easier to adopt a tolerant attitude in those areas where the Gospel is still comparatively a newcomer, and the field has not been spoilt by a misunderstanding iconoclasm. One

^{*} P. Hazoumé, *Cinquante Ans d'Apostolat au Dahomey*.

should encourage Christian workers to practise charity and toleration, to be positive in their teaching and not destructive, to teach Christianity as the best that men have dreamed of. One most often finds a welcome for enlightenment about God; these people have "a zeal for God", and value spiritual things above material, having a keener perception of the importance of the spiritual than is shown by many Europeans, who set an example of practical atheism. One finds an appreciation of the story of the coming of the Son of God, for their own gods are in some sense sons of God, and their historical perceptions are not yet developed. The Cross is still a stumbling-block, for it is difficult to imagine that men could be so cruel, or that such a thing were possible. They understand the point of the simile of Christ as the light of the world, and the Sun, before whose daylight the lanterns of previous avatars are superseded. It is difficult, as yet, to press the difference of historical fact and myth; it is the moral and religious side of the Gospel that must make the chief appeal.

Iconoclasm is not necessary, in the early stages. Pagans should be encouraged to attend services, and will realize that there are privileges that must be withheld until they have taken a final stand. As devotees of other gods dedicate themselves to their sole service, so when a man is baptized he readily understands that now he must serve no other gods. He must do this freely, and abandon his charms and images himself. One should also forbid all provocative practices, such as killing or eating pythons that are sacred to pagans, which can only bring discredit and persecution upon Christians. Since there is generally toleration among pagan cults, so Christians should be more and not less charitable. One should also oppose the reprehensible practice whereby sometimes Christians imagine that they no longer need to give due deference to their own village chiefs; a Christian must seek to avoid by all means any detribalization.¹

It is much more difficult to teach tolerance, and the gradualist approach, in regions where missions have been long established. African Christians are often even more zealous to destroy than is the European, at least on the surface and as far as the gods are concerned, though there are few who do not still believe in magic and witchcraft. One must begin again with the

¹ It has been suggested that questions of sin and redemption need examination in the light of West African psychology, but these matters demand full treatment of their own and are beyond the immediate scope of this book.

younger Christians, and in particular with the catechists and ministers and priests. I believe that it is essential in every training college to teach comparative and primitive religious study. It is astonishing that Latin, and even Greek, and abstruse points of textual criticism, may be taught, and the student left in ignorance of the most elementary principles by which to understand the religion of the people among whom he is to work. From personal experience, I can testify to the enlightenment that comes to the African, from understanding the faith of his countrymen, without in the least detracting from the soundness of Christian belief.

More important still, the African Christian advocate, be he minister or layman, must be spiritually-minded. Much of the training at present given is too academic. It is based too closely on the model of the syllabuses of training colleges in Europe, and even there the current programmes are often criticized as being little helpful in preparation for pastoral work. Demonstrations of applied and child psychology would be more useful than learning the lists of the kings of Judah, or the geography of St. Paul's travels. But it is even more necessary to cultivate a deeper spirituality.¹

In pagan religion, the priest is a man of his god. He develops his psychic powers, disciplines himself by retreats, studies human nature, and becomes the wise man of the village. Far too often the Christian man of God is burdened with organization, transplanted entire from England or America, is an administrator of disciplinary measures, and a collector of spiritual insurance money from his harassed flock.

The African priest nearly always has a part-time occupation; he is a hunter or a blacksmith, or at least he has a field which he cultivates. The Christian too often has come to think that it is degrading to soil his hands, and that he must be a clerk like the European. He may be told not to engage in manual work, lest his miserable salary be lowered; hence, if he has no school, he may drift into idleness or mischief.

One does not forget that the catechist may often have charge of a small school; but unless he is a trained teacher, this is not a full-time job. It might be suggested that he should be allowed and encouraged either to engage in some manual or agricultural occupation, half-time, or else be fully trained as both teacher

¹ I have not room here to describe, but I most strongly commend, work that has been done on the Christianization of initiation rites in some places, and the imaginative approach as depicted in Mabel Shaw's *God's Candlelights*.

and lay preacher. Some such adjustment will have to be made for the ordained ministry, when numerous enough to replace the catechist. African economy is not likely, for long years, to be able to support a large full-time ministry, at least with pay that is not a humiliation to intelligent young men.

In West African religion, women priests are generally on the same level as men, and women devotees and mediums far outnumber the men. Christianity has not yet made sufficient use of women preachers and spiritual leaders. I knew a Christian prophetess, in the Ivory Coast, who exerted a great and deeply spiritual influence upon the crowds who came to see her.

Christianity must become really indigenous, if it is to gain the African's heart. We need native, orthodox prophets, like the Indian Sadhu Singh; and if the Church cannot produce and guide them, then the number of heretical semi-pagan preachers will grow. The definite movement away to the separatist Churches will increase, as the prestige of the European lowers, and as the influence of education becomes more secularized. The separatism will be intensified, if the Churches become top-heavy with administration, and if they allow themselves to be identified with reaction and the maintenance of the status quo, instead of guiding and helping the growing social and economic movements.

Much of what has been suggested above may sound dangerously like syncretism, watering down the faith in order to capture the popular vote. One need not be afraid of a word. Syncretism is bound to happen, is happening everywhere, as it has done in our own land where we have westernized an oriental faith. Without seeking deliberately to introduce extraneous elements, we might at least strive to discover whether there are not fuller implications, in Christian faith and Church life, than those which we have found useful for our urban culture in Europe.

Syncretism is occurring everywhere; the problem is how to guide it. The African has a great reverence for his ancestors: some would say that it is the foundation of all his ethics. Roman Catholicism partly meets the spiritual need, by masses for the dead. But even Protestant funeral cards often bear the words "Pray for him", and memorial services, held a week or more after burial, are increasingly common; though lamented by some missionaries. The Yoruba Christians have retained ancestral memorials in the "Sitting Sunday", the first after burial; the "Churching", the second Sunday; and in wearing special family dresses (*asho ebi*).

Very important factors in the situation are the so-called "African" separatist Churches. In South Africa, in 1947, there were 800 separatist Churches; of which the majority bore a title indicating their national or African character.¹ These separatist Churches are on the increase in West Africa, and cannot be ignored as potent factors in the social order.

It is in the African separated sects that syncretism is at its strongest, although in varying degrees. Some pride themselves on their strict adherence to the constitution of the Church from which they dissented, with the sole exception of polygamy. Others are scarcely distinguishable from pagan cults, except that, superficially at least, they renounce the pagan gods and profess to revere Christ. Emotionalism is rife, and followers of some undisciplined prophets, like Bebe of the Ivory Coast, remind one of the Holy Rollers of America. I have seen them twisting themselves about, and falling to the ground, in an agony of self-induced frenzy.

But outward reforms in the Church's organization will not capture the African's deepest loyalty, unless one has penetrated to the depths of his soul, and understood the motives that prompt him. Without this understanding, it is almost impossible to get into touch spiritually with the mind of the African. One may speak of what appear to us great and self-evident spiritual truths, without stirring him at all. Hence a purely superficial approach to African religion and psychology, instead of helping to civilize them, will but uproot them from their foundations, and tend to increase the number of the dissatisfied and the potential revolutionaries.

Father Tempels has some very wise words here. The teaching of physics, biology, and hygiene may alter the African's own natural science, but it will not change his fundamental ideas about the universe. Even if he peers with his own eyes through a microscope, at the outward and apparent causes of death, he will still believe that there is a deeper, spiritual cause; some vital force that is impaired or increased.²

The old men find that the result of our civilizing work is to have ruined the young men, by making them accept the pursuit of money as the sole aim of life. By living with white people they have abandoned their ancestral traditions, and have adopted the standards of the European. Their god is now Mammon, their sole aim and ideal in life is money. They did

¹ B. G. M. Sundkler, *Bantu Prophets in South Africa*, 1948, App. B.

² *Op. cit.*, pp. 11-12.

not learn this in the mission schools, but they learnt it in the school of life, where they found the "philosophy of money" enshrined as the dominant motive in the lives of most Europeans.

The traditional philosophy of life, based upon natural law, is despised. The greatest menace to Africa today is not education, or western religion, but is that gross materialism which leads to blatant atheism, mockery both of African religion and of Christianity, and finally the lawlessness and crime which result from the abandonment of all sanctions. Such a condition, already present in many towns, is a menace to the continent and to the world.

If the masses are simply westernized, their religious faith will be stifled. But as Christianity has, at least partly and at times, permeated European society and rebuilt it after the collapse of old empires, so Christianity has the resources wherewith to save and reconstruct African society.

The full Christian, and truly catholic, faith teaches that man was created in order to share in the divine life. It is sacramental, believing in spiritual power manifested through outward phenomena. It does not denounce the world as utterly evil; that would be heretical dualism. This world is God's world; evil exists but to be overcome; and we are workers together with God for the establishment of his kingdom. Life is to be reinforced and raised, to share in the life of God himself.

Father Tempels ends with a declaration, shocking no doubt to certain doctrinaire partisans, but full of hope for the Christian believer, and for the African who cares for the future spiritual growth of his country. He arrives at this unpopular conclusion: that African paganism, the ancient African wisdom, aspires from the bottom of its African soul towards the very soul of Christian spirituality.¹

¹ *Op. cit.*, pp. 149-150.

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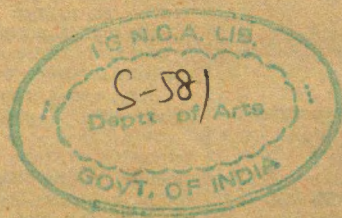
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